UNCONSCIOUS COMEDIANS

CAROLINE DUER

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By

CAROLINE DUER

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	An Unaccountable Countess . . .	3
II.	The Aloofness of Lucy	33
III.	My Niece, Mrs. Dove	63
IV.	An Unfinished Elopement	105
V.	Rumours	171

I

AN UNACCOUNTABLE COUNTESS

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I

AN UNACCOUNTABLE COUNTESS

"MY dear," said Mrs. Selwyn, impressively, "don't mention it to anybody, but Miranda's engaged."

"Is she?" cried Mrs. Selwyn's old friend, wagging her red wig earnestly. "Really! It's the Hon. Mr. Fitz-Arthur, of course."

Mrs. Selwyn admitted that it was the Hon. Mr. Fitz-Arthur, and had a great deal to tell about her anxiety in entrusting her only child's happiness to an Englishman, to say nothing of her grief at the prospect of that child's new home being situated so far from her own brownstone habitation.

"But he need not live in England, need he?" said Miss Smiley. "Why can't they settle here?"

Mrs. Selwyn thought the Prince could hardly bear to lose such a favourite companion.

It seemed that Mr. Fitz-Arthur belonged to so prominent a family that the idea of one of them disappearing from English society for any lengthened period was not to be entertained for an instant.

Miss Smiley was abashed. She had not at first understood the full glories of the match her friend's daughter was making. She had known Miranda when that young lady's parents were in the wholesale drug business, and it was hard to grasp the fact that she now associated with the high and mighty in her own country, and was about to "contract an alliance" with one of the higher and mightier in another. She murmured that she supposed it would n't do.

"No," said Mrs. Selwyn. "I must lose her. She is making a splendid match. If she only keeps her health — but you know poor Selwyn had a wretched constitution. I often told him so. It 's a wonder he lived as long as he did, but I declare, if he had known how persecuted I was going to be with lawyers and lawsuits about the property the moment the breath was out of his body, he 'd have made an effort to live longer. The way those relatives

of his have behaved to me—but there! I shall say no more. They will hear from me in court!"

Miss Smiley said she did n't doubt it—she knew her friend's intrepid spirit—and, Miranda entering the room at this moment, she rose to go, being somewhat in awe of the girl's bold black eyes and haughty manner.

"Don't be in a hurry," said Mrs. Selwyn, the goodness of whose heart was only equalled by the recklessness of her language. "That fool of a butler of mine ought to be in with the tea. Ring the bell, Miranda. I got him from Mrs. Stone, with such a character, my dear! But then, you never know. I 've missed two of my best tablecloths—he says they went to the wash; I told him if they had they 'd be back by this time. He was most impertinent, and wanted to know if I thought *he* had stolen them. 'When I think so,' said I, 'I 'll say so—you go downstairs.' Did you ever know such goings on? But I believe they all drink."

"Saunders is the best servant you ever had, mamma," said Miranda, firmly. "You know

he does n't drink, and you may remember that the tablecloths were found. I do wish you would not get into such states about nothing."

Mrs. Selwyn turned as if to give battle to her daughter, — she had a majestic way of turning, not her head only, but the whole upper part of her person as she sat, — then, encountering an unmoved and stern expression on Miranda's face, she thought better of it and turned back again to Miss Smiley.

She both loved and feared Miranda, who had a calm temper and an iron will.

Miss Smiley did not love Miranda at all, but she did fear her, and it was very timidly that she proffered her congratulations on the approaching marriage.

"So mamma has told you," said Miranda, hardly taking the pains to conceal her annoyance. "It is not really to be announced until Monday. I hope you will say nothing about it. I suppose every one guesses it, but I prefer to make it known at my own time and in my own way. We are to be married in two weeks, if you care to know it. Very short engagement, you say? Oh, Mr. Fitz-Arthur

and I came to an understanding some time ago, or he would not have come out here now."

"Yes," said Mrs. Selwyn, pouring the tea, which the abused Saunders had brought in. "Fitz-Arthur admired Miranda very much when we were in London, and his father, Lord Penton — the Earl of Penton, you know — had himself introduced to me at once. A fine-looking man. Such vitality for his years! I wish poor Selwyn had had such a constitution. There's nothing like health! I never had a day's illness in my life, except when Miranda was born, and my mother was as strong as I am. I said to Fitz-Arthur, only the other day: 'Now I give you my daughter a perfect specimen of health; but take care of her, for she inherits her father's constitution.' But, my dear, these young men! What do they care for what an old woman says to them? I don't suppose he will take care of her. Englishmen always ——"

But here Miranda interrupted.

"Suppose you send Miss Smiley home in the carriage if she has finished her tea," she said. "The horses have been stamping about

outside for an age, and you have still to dress if you are going to that musical at all this afternoon."

"Have they been waiting long? Dear me! I don't know how it is I always contrive to be so late for everything. You 'll go home in the carriage, Miss Smiley, while I get my bonnet on."

And Mrs. Selwyn swept from the room, while poor Miss Smiley, her feeble protests set aside by Miranda, was shut into the large brown chariot that waited at the door, and rattled off to her home, vainly searching in her pocket for money which she would not have spent on a cab, that she might bestow it upon her powerful friend's overpowering servants.

Miranda followed her mother upstairs.

"I had to get rid of her," she said, "because I must talk to you a little before Alan comes, and he will be here presently. We can't live in London for what you propose to give us, mamma. At least, we can't live properly."

Mrs. Selwyn, who was standing before the glass tying the magenta velvet strings of her

most expensive bonnet, flushed a deep red and turned round angrily.

"I think you are out of your senses, Miranda," she exclaimed. "If your father and I had had fifteen thousand a year to begin on — but, there, I am an old fool to expect gratitude from any one, even my own child! Do you know what it costs me to keep up this house and the place in the country? Why, cheated as I am by all my tradespeople and every one of the servants, and robbed right and left of the very property your poor father left me, it is a wonder I can give you as much as I do."

"You would not miss double the amount," said Miranda, calmly; "and how can you bear to send me into society in England without the means of doing myself and you credit? When you come over to see us you will be sorry that you were not more generous."

"Well, of course, if I were going to make my home with you it would be different," admitted Mrs. Selwyn, "but to keep two or three places going here and there — really, Miranda, you are just as bad as all the rest of

them. You want me to give — give — give all the time."

"How can you say so, mamma?" Miranda looked both haughty and offended. "You really hurt my feelings very much. Have n't I been a pleasure and a pride to you always, and are n't you delighted with the match I 'm making? You know that you will make your home with me whenever you are in England, and I should think you would be glad to spend your money for the credit of papa's name."

"It 's the Fitz-Arthur name that will get the credit of Selwyn's money. Don't talk to me, my dear. When it comes to what English pockets will swallow I could tell a tale! What is Lord Penton going to give his son? Not the half of what I am giving my daughter!"

"That is not his fault, mamma. You know he is not rich — you knew it before. And Alan is a younger son. What could you expect?"

"I did n't expect to have my own flesh and blood turn against the mother who is ready to give her the clothes off her back!" cried Mrs. Selwyn, almost in tears.

Miranda glanced at her parent's dress, which,

though rich in material, was startling in pattern and not very tidy, and shuddered.

"You know you do not mean what you say," she said. "I am *not* turning against you, and you are *not* ready to give me the clothes off your back just yet, it seems — or, rather, enough money to provide many clothes for mine in the future. I suppose it is selfish in me to think of it, but I feel as if I should miss so much the things to which I have been accustomed. There! The carriage has come back. You ought to be going. I suppose I shall not be able to keep a carriage."

"Yes, you will, Miranda," cried Mrs. Selwyn, her kind heart wrung by the thought of her handsome daughter trudging along the streets of London, while high, proud ladies rolled by in their barouches. "You shall have a carriage that will match the best owned by any duchess among them. There! I must spare you another ten thousand a year for the present, I suppose. I 'll have to stop a couple of lawsuits, though, to do it. And your husband will have something, and that ought to do to begin with. By-and-by I 'll be dead, and you 'll have it all."

"Don't talk of that, mamma," and Miranda kissed her mother affectionately. "You will live a long time and come to see me every year. Alan will insist upon it."

Then Mrs. Selwyn went to her musical, and Miranda went downstairs to receive Mr. Fitz-Arthur.

The engagement was announced in a few days, and everybody appeared immensely pleased.

Mrs. Selwyn delighted in pointing out her handsome son-in-law-to-be to those who did not know him, and in recalling again and again to the memories of those who did, how old and distinguished was his family, and how intimate he had always been with the "dear Prince."

The Hon. Mr. Fitz-Arthur said his mother-in-law was a dear old woman, and had lots of character.

Miranda's eyes seemed blacker and her manner haughtier than ever. She was rather thankful that, of all her future relations, only a brother and sister of Alan's came over for the wedding, but she was careful not to say so, and Mrs. Selwyn took them into her home

and her heart, and made them welcome to the best that she had.

Saunders became so exalted after Lord Times had alluded to him as a "deuced good butler," that he might have stolen the tablecloths every week and never been called to account.

Finally the wedding took place, the bride and groom sailed for England, and Lord Times and his sister reluctantly departed to make a tour through the States. They had really grown very fond of Mrs. Selwyn during their visit, and tried to persuade her to accompany them, but she said she must rest and recover after all the excitement, and so they went, and she was left alone.

She did not mind it so much at first. All the servants had to be dismissed and new ones procured, whose vices it took a week or two to discover.

She gave one dance and two musicals and a great many dinners, went to the Opera three times a week, and otherwise entertained herself and society at large during the Winter.

She did not go to London in the Spring, though she declared that Miranda had warmly pressed her to do so. She went to the country

instead, and made Miss Smiley come and pay her a long visit. Miss Smiley loved visiting, and cocked her red wig more jauntily than ever when she received the invitation.

But though Mrs. Selwyn kept a brave front to the world she was really very lonely. People came and stayed with her, but she said they only used her house for a hotel, and she saw very little of them. She was very fond of and very good to all the young girls of her acquaintance, but she missed her daughter. Miranda did n't write very often, and when she did write it was generally because she wanted something. And as time went on she wanted more and more, but she never appeared to want her mother.

At the end of a year a boy was born to the Fitz-Arthurs, and Mrs. Selwyn, very proud of being a grandmother, decided upon going to England to see Miranda. Those visits of hers that Alan was to have insisted upon had not even been suggested, and that home that she was to make with her daughter had melted in air, but she never doubted her welcome. It was, consequently, a great blow to her on her arrival in London to feel her own exuberant

warmth of manner chilled by Miranda's coldness and to find that she was expected to take herself and her belongings to a hotel and not to her daughter's house.

Miranda drove her to the hotel in that carriage that was to equal the duchess's best, and left her for the night, promising, however, to return early the next day.

Poor Mrs. Selwyn! She had expected to be met with open arms and to be taken to the house that she had given her daughter, to be welcomed by her son-in-law, to be allowed to see her grandson at once — and here she was sitting down to a lonely dinner in a half-empty hotel dining-room! No wonder that she could not eat, that she found she had a very bad headache and that she scolded her maid violently when that much-abused young woman dragged a hairpin too roughly from its place while taking off her hair for the night.

Things were a little better the next day. Miranda came to fetch her mother and the two ladies lunched together in Mrs. Fitz-Arthur's pretty dining-room, and Mrs. Selwyn was taken all over the house and told of all the things that were still lacking in its comfort, and

finally introduced to the baby and encouraged to make him a handsome present. The Hon. Mr. Fitz-Arthur did not appear.

"I suppose he's off somewhere with the Prince," said Mrs. Selwyn, hopefully. "No? Well, I hope he means to pay his respects to me very soon. I've done a great deal for him and for his family, as you know. I hope he does n't mean to hold aloof from me."

"Now, mamma," interposed Miranda, "please don't be ridiculous. Alan has gone to see his father. Lord Penton goes to Paris to-morrow."

"Paris, indeed! These old men, my dear! Don't tell me! Monte Carlo, too, no doubt, running after women and losing his money. I know how men behave, my dear. The older they are the worse they are. I could tell you something about them!"

"Not about Lord Penton, mamma. He is the most quiet, stay-at-home man in the world. He is only going away for his health."

"For his health! Why, a more vigorous-looking old man I never saw. What has he been doing with himself since then? Health, indeed! I don't believe a word of it."

"He had the influenza very badly a short time ago, and it left him rather seedy; before that he was awfully fit."

"I 'm sorry he 's going," said Mrs. Selwyn. "I rather wanted to consult him about a mine I think he owns some shares in."

"I don't think he could advise you, mamma. He never talks business with women. At any rate, I am afraid you will hardly see him before he goes."

"Are n't you going to see him — your own father-in-law? I might go with you. It is n't as if his wife were alive."

"I think it would hardly do, mamma, to force yourself upon Lord Penton's privacy simply because you want advice about investments," said Miranda, coldly.

She was not very anxious to throw her mother into the society of Lord Penton and his family until some of that lady's most startling eccentricities of dress and manner had been slightly toned down. She was rather afraid of her father-in-law, who, she felt, was fully alive to her own weaknesses.

"Force myself on any one is what I never did and never shall do, Miranda," cried Mrs.

Selwyn, greatly incensed. "If you 'll be kind enough to order the carriage, or send that impudent young grinning jackanapes of a footman of yours to get a cab for me, I 'll go back to the hotel. I 'm quite upset by the way you 've talked to me."

Miranda hastened to apologise, but Mrs. Selwyn insisted upon departure, leaving her daughter in some anxiety as to whether she had not jeopardised the arrival of a grand piano, a new carpet, curtains, and a sofa for the drawing-room, to say nothing of the baby's present, by her ill-advised attempts to keep her mother's kindly vulgarities from her father-in-law's aristocratic eyes.

Mrs. Selwyn went back to the hotel in great anger. Here was her own child as good as saying outright that she did not want her mother to intrude upon the family into which that mother's money had enabled her to marry.

"If she 's ashamed of me," said Mrs. Selwyn, wiping her eyes, "I 'm ashamed of her." But she was a forgiving old lady, and when a note came from Miranda asking her to go to the Opera the next evening, she put on her most gorgeous old white brocade covered

with roses as big as cabbages, and went. She also had on all her jewelry — emeralds, diamonds, and turquoises in the utmost splendour and confusion.

"Dear mamma," cried Miranda (the piano had arrived that afternoon, and the man had come to measure the curtains), "how grand you are! Only you have on a great many colours, and this is not the first time that you have worn that dress. Your maid really ought to have put in new sleeves."

Mrs. Selwyn could have pointed out half a dozen duchesses snuffier than herself, but she hoped, perhaps, that Miranda was taking an interest in her, so, though she felt somewhat mortified, she was not angry, and only said: —

"I wish you would come and scold the lazy little hussy. She does n't care any more what I say to her. Maids really are the most thievish, immoral, good-for-nothing set. I can tell you a story ——"

But here Mr. Fitz-Arthur came in, and Mrs. Selwyn's confidences went no farther.

He was polite but rather indifferent as a son-in-law, and after he had shaken hands

he seated himself in the back of the box and made it quite evident that he did n't mean to talk.

A great many distinguished people were in the house that night, and not a few of them came to Mrs. Fitz-Arthur's box, for she was handsome and clever, and very much the fashion. Mrs. Selwyn heard scraps of their conversation. It appeared that the Prince was going to dine at her daughter's house the following week. Now Mrs. Selwyn longed to meet the Prince.

All the next week she hoped against hope that her daughter would ask her to meet him. She knew, of course, that a list of the guests had to be submitted to His Royal Highness, but when she was convinced that her name was not among them, she saw no reason why she should not be included in those few who were invited to the small musical which followed the dinner. At last she broached the subject to Miranda.

"You would hardly enjoy it, mamma. There will be very few older people. I am asking only the Prince's set, and not many of them."

"Well, I can't see that it would hurt them to have your mother present. I don't expect to come to the dinner now, but I really think it will look very odd if you don't have your own mother at the musical," cried Mrs. Selwyn.

"Half of the people don't know that I have a mother and the other half have forgotten it," said Miranda. "Indeed, you would n't enjoy it. They won't be polite to you — but come, of course, if you like."

"I went to a lot of the best people when we were here before," exclaimed Mrs. Selwyn, angrily.

"And so did I," returned Miranda, "but we went as outsiders. Now I am one of them and you are not. I know how they feel about outsiders. But, as I said before, come if you like."

Mrs. Selwyn's anxiety to be in the same room with the Prince almost induced her to avail herself of this grudging permission, but when Miranda added, "Only don't blame me if you find yourself uncomfortable and out of place," her resentment became too strong to be subdued, and she exclaimed passionately:

"You need n't be afraid. I would n't come now if you asked me on your bended knees; and that 's the way you 'll have to ask me for anything you and Fitz-Arthur want in the future. Good-bye, Miranda; if you ever have a daughter, I hope she 'll be better to you than you have been to me."

And she walked out of the room and shut the door.

The next day she had her trunks packed and departed, shaking the dust of London from her feet. She did not care to return to America after so short a stay, for she felt that people would divine how poor a welcome she had received. She went to Paris instead, and finding herself rather bored there, transferred herself and her maid and her trunks to the Reservoir Hotel at Versailles.

She possessed what is known as a "presence" and carried herself with so much majesty that all the other inhabitants of the hotel took her for a dowager English duchess at least, which soothed her ruffled feelings and made her resolve to stay several days longer than she had at first intended.

One morning, as she was returning from a

visit to the Trianon, she was accosted, as she crossed the entrance hall, by the manager, who begged, with many smiles and courteous gestures, that the so amiable English duchess would tell him if she knew anything in her own land of a very excellent Milor Penton, who had arrived at the hotel late the preceding night and had suddenly been taken alarmingly ill.

Mrs. Selwyn, in intrepid French, inquired the number of the English milor's room, and was mounting the stairs to it before the manager could recover from his astonishment. He was comforted, however. Evidently the English duchess, who chose to call herself simply Madame, *did* know the English milor.

Mrs. Selwyn knocked at the door of the room, and it was opened by Lord Penton's valet. The poor man was frightened to death about his master, who was, in truth, quite out of his head and raving in the first stages of pneumonia. Mrs. Selwyn began to bully at once. Had he sent for a doctor and nurse from Paris? Of course not! She might have known it. Here, go downstairs and ask

the manager who was the most distinguished doctor in France, and send for him at once. She would write a message to the manager. Perhaps, while they waited for the *best*, there might be some sort of a doctor in Versailles.

In a few minutes she had established a sort of bustling supremacy over the affairs of both the master and the man.

She was an excellent sick-nurse, and she meant to nurse Lord Penton, whether it was strictly her business or not. The dangerous condition of the poor old gentleman and the helplessness of his servant touched her kind heart, and there was nothing she did not do for them. A doctor came and a nurse was sent for, but until that nurse arrived Mrs. Selwyn sat up night and day. She never was tired. She always knew what was to be done, and she never scrupled to tell other people what to do.

When, after weeks of anxiety, the doctor pronounced the patient a little better, he openly avowed that it was as much owing to Mrs. Selwyn's care as to his own skill.

When Lord Penton was first taken ill Mrs. Selwyn had telegraphed to his eldest son to

come to him, but the telegram had never reached Lord Times, who was off on a cruise with a friend; and when Lord Penton's reason returned to him he declared himself quite satisfied to remain in such very excellent hands, and begged her not to send for his daughters. He was not a rich man, and their joining him would have added not a little to his expenses, but this he naturally kept to himself.

Mrs. Selwyn amused him very much; her kind heart and her eccentricities, her good actions and her violent modes of expression were most stimulating to his interest.

When he got well enough to lie on the sofa in his room she used to come and sit in the window beside him and give him the benefit of her judgment upon the world at large and Versailles in particular. The pictures in the great galleries were such as would have pleased the taste of the late Mr. Selwyn, she was sure. She herself only felt that most of the ladies were no better than they should be. "Talk of immorality, my dear," she would say, hands and eyes raised to heaven in protest, "when it comes to exhibiting the pictures of the creatures and their apartments! And the amount of

money it costs you to see them, too! A fee here for the gallery, and another there for the ball-room, and something for the man who shows you Marie Antoinette's apartments — that's a very curious corner where the looking-glass reflects you without your head — a franc to go down the secret staircase, and another to walk round Mme. de Maintenon's bed! And those Trianons, and the stable with state coaches, and the park, and the fountains! I declare I 'm nearly ruined! and I always get everywhere so late that I hardly have the benefit of my money before they shut the place up. But I 'm glad I 've seen it. Selwyn always said that travelling and sight-seeing are very broadening to the mind. Poor Selwyn! I could never have pulled him through such an illness as you have had."

"If kindness and good nursing could have done it you would certainly have managed it, my dear lady," said Lord Penton, gallantly.

"But look at your constitution; that's what saved you, and that's what Selwyn never had. Sometimes I 'm afraid that Miranda takes after him. I warned Fitz-Arthur when he married her to be very careful of her, but I

did n't think she looked at all well in London. She did n't behave just like herself, either."

"When were you in London?" asked Lord Penton. "I did not know you were expected."

"Well, I don't know that I was expected," returned Mrs. Selwyn, "and, judging from my reception, I think I was n't much wanted, either; but I meant to see my grandson, and I came. Miranda 's a good girl, of course, but sometimes she forgets what 's due to her mother, and that 's what Selwyn would never have permitted if he had been alive."

"I trust," said Lord Penton, gravely, "that Alan has never been in any way lacking in consideration for you. It would be the height of ingratitude."

"Oh, I 've no fault to find with either of them. They are just like all the young people of the day, I suppose, only I don't understand them. They are swells, and I am not. As Miranda said, I 'm an 'outsider.' That was when she did n't want me to come to her musical to meet the Prince. Do you see anything in me that 's too ridiculous to meet the Prince, Lord Penton?"

"Indeed, I do not, Mrs. Selwyn," returned Lord Penton. "I should consider him honoured, as I am, by your acquaintance. I can't imagine what Miranda was thinking of."

"Well, I was angry enough at the time," said Mrs. Selwyn, "but I 'm not now. Though I do think that it was a pity that I had to miss such an opportunity. Of course, I would not go when she said that, and I remember being pretty outspoken about it, which is contrary to my usual habit. I 'm afraid she 's angry with me now, for I have had no answer to my last letter, and I sent her a check in it, too, just to show there was no ill-feeling. I may have a bad temper, but I can't keep on being angry with my only child. She 's all I have got in the world."

Mrs. Selwyn wiped her eyes stealthily and looked out of the window.

Lord Penton sat upright on the sofa.

"I am an old man, Mrs. Selwyn," he said, "and I have very little to offer you, but if you want someone to take care of you, someone who has a warm affection for you, you can't do better than to take me."

"Penton!" gasped Mrs. Selwyn; "you

don't mean it? Why, Miranda was so afraid you 'd be shocked by me that she did n't want us to meet again after she was married."

"Hang Miranda!" cried Lord Penton. "Will you marry me?"

A few days after, the Hon. Mr. and Mrs. Fitz-Arthur arrived in breathless haste at Versailles in answer to a telegram.

Mrs. Selwyn met her daughter at the door.

"There are a great many things you may say to me, Miranda," she said guiltily, "for when I am Lady Penton, I sha'n't really be one of you, any more than I am now. But you can't ever say *then* that I shall 'intrude on Lord Penton's privacy,' and I must tell you that the *Prince* has written to congratulate him, and His Royal Highness hopes that we will join him at Homburg as soon as we are married."

II

THE ALOOFNESS OF LUCY

II

THE ALOOFNESS OF LUCY

THE wagonette, which had been sent to the station to meet the guests, had just deposited six of them, with their host, at the hall door. The cart containing their baggage was already lumbering up the avenue, followed by the station cab, which had been impressed into the service of Mrs. Dangerfield's maid and Mr. Grifforth's man.

The cold air rushed in with the guests as they entered, and the warmth of the log fire and the glow of the lamps leaped out to meet them with a welcome no less hearty than that of their hostess. Feminine coats were unfastened and veils were pushed up, while the masculine shells were being shed with the rapidity and carelessness usually exhibited by men on such occasions. Tea-cups rattled, tongues were unloosened, chatter and laughter broke out in little treble gusts, while over-

head the tramp, tramp, of the servants' feet as they carried the trunks about made a sort of bass-drum accompaniment.

Mrs. Dangerfield wanted more than tea to warm *her* after her drive, she said, and little Miss Doll's eyes grew as round as saucers when they beheld the tall, dark, Italian-looking goddess toss down a small glassful of fiery brandy quite as if it were not the first time she had taken it in public. Brandy out of a spoon, or accompanied by boiling water, and administered by one's old nurse (Miss Doll's parents had long been dead) as medicine for a heavy cold, Miss Doll knew and shuddered at, but brandy drunk needlessly and light-heartedly, out of a glass — well! she did not think she should like Mrs. Dangerfield. Mrs. Dangerfield, on the contrary, felt that she could be enthusiastic about Miss Doll. "Such a sweet little creature," she told her hostess when the sweet little creature had crept upstairs, terrified by the appearance of a footman with a presented tray and a demand for trunk-keys.

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Fenton, with a suddenness that almost amounted to a snap,

" very sweet, and simple, and timid, and tiresome; and what I 'm to do with her for the next two days I don't know. She 's too good for this wicked world, let alone for this house-party."

" Why did you ask her?" inquired Miss Wilson, boldly, from the depths of a huge arm-chair. " Was it to play with Marjorie?" — (Marjorie was Mrs. Fenton's seventeen-year-old daughter, whom she kept in the school-room) — " or to act as a guardian angel to Harry here? She 's rather pretty in a faint, ineffectual way. Has she money? Harry can't be guarded by an angel without money."

Harry, whose last name was Lancet, sprang from the piano-stool where he had been sitting playing scraps of music-hall melodies, and made his way to the centre of the group round the fire.

" No, thank you!" he cried, in his rather squeaky, high voice, " no angels of that sort for me. She has n't a ray of good looks, and she dresses like — like bags! Mrs. Dangerfield and Miss Wilson and I all agreed that we had never conceived of such an outer

garment as that in which she encased herself when we got into the wagonette. It was neither more nor less than a duffle bed-gown."

"God bless my soul, sir, what do you mean? She looked warm and comfortable, did n't she? A devilish nice little girl!" cried Mr. Fenton, irritably, scorching the sole of each shoe alternately, as he stood, first on one foot and then on the other, with his back to the fire. He was considerably older than his wife, and often irritated with her and her guests.

"She 's Stanley's ward, you know," said Mrs. Fenton, in an explanatory manner. "He likes me to have her down here occasionally. She 's a most exemplary young person, and never gives him any anxiety. She has a little money, not enough for Harry — but then she would never aspire to anything so expensive as Harry — and a wholesome awe of her guardian."

"She seems to be afraid of everyone," said Miss Wilson. "She ran like a rabbit when Clarkson asked for her keys; but she is pretty."

"Well, I can't see it," cried Harry, shrilly. "Do you, Ransome? Do you, Grifforth?"

Ransome, a big, brown-bearded man, talking to Mrs. Dangerfield, did not answer. Grifforth, who, owing to her preoccupation, found himself temporarily unoccupied, replied, in his quiet way, that the night had been too dark and her stay downstairs too brief to allow of his observing the young lady, but he preferred to believe all women good-looking until they were proved to be otherwise.

"Bravo, Frank!" cried Mrs. Fenton. "You shall take her in to dinner."

But here Miss Wilson skilfully interposed.

"Oh, my dear Mary," she said, "I must cut up his food for him; his left hand is no good, and I promised faithfully to be a left hand to him when the doctor let him come here. You must send him in with me. These reckless riders are not to be trusted to the feeble fingers of young saints."

"Not when there are any old sinners about," muttered Harry, aside to his hostess, as Grifforth bowed his acknowledgments and concealed his embarrassment. "I say, Mrs.

Fenton, she's getting bolder every day she gets older."

"She's a handsome woman, and has no age. They say the men are crazy about her in London," returned that lady. "You'd be so, too, if she ever did anything but laugh at you. Well who takes Miss Doll to dinner? I have it: Little Fred Middleton is coming down by the next train. He asked himself. He's just come back from Puerto Rico. We'll make him do it. We'll tell him she's an heiress. It will be an awfully good joke on him. She can't talk a bit, and he will labour along like an overweighted steam-engine all through dinner. There's a native from the neighbourhood coming for you, Harry. An agreeable rattle — the kind you like." And with a wave of her hand she dismissed him and carried off the women to their rooms to dress.

Mrs. Fenton's maid never waited upon any "company" whose fortune and position did not command respect in the servants' hall. Mrs. Dangerfield had brought her own maid, not that her position did not induce every attention, but from motives of prudence. Miss

Wilson had at once secured the assistance of the house-maid, and poor little Miss Doll, after ringing her bell vainly some half-dozen times, was finally obliged to make a sally into the hall in search of help. Fortunately, she caught sight of an apron whisking into Miss Wilson's room, and, hurrying after it, she knocked gently at the door. Miss Wilson cried, "Come in," and Miss Doll's small face peered anxiously through the opening, while she made known her wants. Could somebody come presently and hook her dress? she wondered.

"And, oh, what a nice fire you have!" she added. "Could I come in for a minute and get warm?"

"Of course," said Miss Wilson. "Have n't you a fire in your room?"

No, Miss Doll had no fire, as her little pink nose testified. She was in her embroidered, crisply-flounced petticoats, and had a blue dressing-sack huddled about her shoulders. She had conscientiously and laboriously unpacked her trunk and put away everything, and she was tired and chilled.

"Is n't there any heat at all in your room,

child?" inquired Miss Wilson, looking down her fine Roman nose at the shivering little figure, and combing her long golden hair with vigorous sweeps, while the housemaid stood by, admiring her.

"I don't think so," said Miss Doll, "unless there 's a register somewhere that has n't been opened — I forgot to look. My room is very small. It looks to me like the dressing-room of some other room, you know, and there 's so much furniture that there could n't be a fireplace, but there might be a register. I 'll go and see."

"No," exclaimed Miss Wilson; "let the woman go. You stay here and do your hair where it 's warm."

"But my hair is done," objected Miss Doll, in distress.

"Oh, is it?" said Miss Wilson, drily, looking at the diminutive hard knot at the back and the dismal little fringe which hung over Miss Doll's forehead. "Suppose you let me have a try at it; your hands were too cold to do yourself justice."

So saying, she tossed up her own yellow locks and set to work upon Miss Doll's with

such good effect that in a few minutes that young person had lost her hunted-rabbit look and become a fluffy-headed doll, indeed, with a face that beamed gratitude and admiration for her friend's skill.

And truly, when they descended the stairs together and found the men assembled, Miss Wilson almost expected a burst of surprised applause, so marvellous was the change she had worked; but, apparently, Miss Doll, even at her best, was not admired by the stronger sex. Not a man appeared to notice her except little Fred Middleton, who gave quite a start when, a few minutes later, Mrs. Fenton named them to each other, and ordered him to take her in to dinner.

To the perpetrators of the heiress joke, however, his conduct during the meal caused the liveliest amusement; such fluent conversation, such evident interest, such delicate attention as he appeared to devote to Miss Doll, surpassed their fondest expectations. The young lady herself also surprised them by her gaiety. She laughed often in her timid way, and even talked furtively when she thought no one was observing her.

She ventured a joke or two with her guardian, at whose left hand she sat, and had quite the air of enjoying herself.

"Edith Wilson has made such a change in that mouse's appearance that she does n't know herself, and is behaving quite like an ordinary woman," exclaimed Mrs. Fenton.

"From Middleton's behaviour I should say he had swallowed the heiress-bait whole," answered Harry Lancet. "How much did you tell him she was worth?"

"Oh, I did n't say how much. I was splendidly vague, but is n't it fun? I declare she looks pretty, now that she has a colour; and that blue gown is n't bad."

"She 'll fly directly up to heaven in it, uttering screams of dismay, if you let her see us gambling after dinner."

"I hope she will fly to bed; that will be nearer and less fatiguing. There! talk to your native for a little; between you and Fred Middleton she's having a hard time," and Mrs. Fenton turned away to bestow her somewhat noisy attention upon Mr. Ransome.

But after dinner it appeared that Miss Doll had no intention of going to bed early. She

sat near Miss Wilson until the men came in, resisting all Mrs. Dangerfield's attempts to draw her into conversation, and stoutly declining to admit that she was in the least tired or sleepy.

When Miss Wilson proposed a game of billiards, Miss Doll came and looked on, asking little, gentle questions of her guardian, beside whom she stood, and taking his snubby replies with great meekness. After the young lady of the neighbourhood had gone, and the whole party had straggled back into the hall, Mrs. Fenton tried to dismiss her with a kiss and a brief "Well, good-night, timid Lucy; go to bed and sleep well."

But Miss Doll said simply, "Oh, are *you* going to bed now, Mrs. Fenton?" and when Mrs. Fenton was obliged to admit that she was not, added quietly, "Then I think I 'll sit up a little longer, too."

"You 'll be shocked to death, Miss Lucy," cried Harry. "We are going to play cards for money."

"But I need n't play; I may watch you," she returned shyly — "that is, if you don't mind?"

"*I* mind," said Miss Wilson, seating herself at the table and beginning to shuffle the pack with wonderful dexterity. "You might see me cheat."

"And *I* mind," said Mrs. Dangerfield, putting an affectionate arm round the girl's shoulders, "because such innocent-looking little ladies ought not to countenance gambling."

Lucy moved gently but decidedly away from the affectionate arm. She still felt she could not like Mrs. Dangerfield.

"Stay if you like, my dear," laughed Mrs. Fenton, "but don't tell your guardian how much I win or lose. He's gone to bed, like a sensible person, has n't he, Harry?"

"No, he's reading in the library," answered Frank Grifforth. "I saw him just now as I passed the door."

"Does he disapprove of cards?" asked Lucy, anxiously. "Then perhaps I'd better not stay."

"Come and talk to me, Miss Doll," said Fred Middleton, gallantly; "cards bore me to death."

"They might be the lesser evil," murmured Harry, exchanging a delighted glance with his

hostess as the two walked away together. But the excitement of the game soon drew their attention from anything less interesting than the hands they held, the chips they staked, and the jack-pots they won or lost.

Some two hours later, when Mrs. Dangerfield rose yawning from the table, declaring that she had put up her last penny and could play no more, Miss Doll and her companion would have been as completely forgotten as last week's newspaper, if Mr. Lancet, in an eccentric gyration about the hall, had not happened to pause in front of the conservatory door. He stopped short, with such an expression of amazement frozen on his countenance that Mrs. Fenton's attention was attracted at once.

"Well, Harry," she cried, with her favourite little screaming laugh, "have they both gone to sleep?"

"No," said Mr. Lancet, swiftly turning away, "not to deceive you, they have *not* gone to sleep."

"Are they still talking?" inquired Miss Wilson, as she swept her winnings off the table.

"No, not just now," returned Mr. Lancet, with reserve.

"What are they doing?" asked Mrs. Dangerfield.

"I'll call them, and you can ask them, if you like," said Mr. Lancet, agreeably. "Come, Miss Lucy," he continued, raising his voice, "this respectable party is about to separate for the night, and, if you please, Mrs. Fenton is thinking of turning out the lights."

At this Miss Doll and Mr. Middleton appeared, blinking a little in the strong glare of the lamps, and appearing rather dazed by the laughing attention they excited.

"Is it very late?" faltered Miss Lucy, looking up at Mr. Grifforth, who happened to be nearest her.

"Not any later for you than for the rest of us," he answered kindly, snapping the lid of his watch. "It's a few minutes after one o'clock."

"Good gracious!" cried Miss Lucy, in terror. "I never dreamed it was so late as that."

"You must have been very amusing, Middleton," remarked Harry Lancet. "Now if

Miss Lucy will bestow a little of her attention upon *me* to-morrow, I 'll try my best to show her that you are n't the only man who can be agreeable for two hours at a stretch. Will you take a drive with me to-morrow, if Mrs. Fenton will trust me with a horse? Do, Miss Lucy; I 'm ever so much more interesting than he is, though he *has* lately been through the perils of the Puerto Rican campaign."

Miss Doll hesitated, cast an appealing glance at Mr. Middleton, and stammered that she should be delighted.

Mrs. Fenton, who was in the act of ascending the stairs, stood stock still with astonishment. Mrs. Dangerfield and Miss Wilson looked at each other with raised eyebrows. Lucy, seeing that they were waiting for her, hastily bowed her good-nights and crept upstairs in their train.

"What happened in the conservatory, Harry?" asked Frank Grifforth, as the two stood near the fireplace smoking.

"Oh, well, you know, it 's mean to play the spy," rejoined Mr. Lancet, "but really, the little girl has a beautiful complexion and very sweet ways of her own, and Fred was

such an ass that he only kissed her twice — at least, only twice while I was looking — not that he saw me, either."

"Oh!" said Frank Grifforth. "Upon my word, I shouldn't have believed it. Such a demure-looking little creature!"

"I see now why cards bore our young friend Middleton," went on Harry. "I thought a change had come o'er the spirit of his dream since we used to knock about together. But wasn't he quick to read as he ran? I declare, I hadn't a notion she was so pleasing."

The appearance of Miss Doll the next morning was marked with some curiosity by Mr. Grifforth.

She did not come down till very late, and unless Miss Wilson or Mr. Middleton were near her — the only two persons with whom she seemed at ease — she appeared as shy and embarrassed as a strange child at a big party.

Frank walked over the golf course with her, ostensibly playing caddy to Miss Wilson (Mrs. Dangerfield never exerted herself in outdoor games), but in reality trying to study Miss

Doll. He was no wiser by the time the party went in to lunch, except that he had learned the names of her governesses and her favourite books, and the places to which she had travelled. Further questioning drew forth the admission that she loved dancing, was glad she was coming out that Winter and would dance a cotillion with him with pleasure. Did he really mean it? Mr. Grifforth was puzzled.

"What under the sun is the matter with the men, Mary?" said Edith Wilson. "They have suddenly gone crazy about Lucy Doll. Fred Middleton talks to her till one o'clock last night; Frank Grifforth has been with her all this morning, and Harry means to take her for a drive this afternoon. She *is* rather a pretty little thing, but very dull, and not at *all* smart. What has got into them?"

"Well, I told Fred she was an heiress, but the other two knew it was only a joke. Frank never looked at her yesterday, and Harry did nothing but make fun of her. It must have been the way you did her hair last night."

"I did n't do it this morning. Look at it!

Did you ever see such a little sight as she is? And look at *them!*" returned Miss Wilson, pointing to where Lucy stood in the hall, talking to Mr. Fenton, while Harry threw in occasional absurdities. Frank Grifforth listened, and little Fred Middleton hovered in the background.

"Mary," said Mr. Fenton, as his wife and Miss Wilson joined the group, "now, I want to ask you, are you going to take these ladies for a nice drive in the wagonette this afternoon? It's a beautiful day and nobody ought to waste it indoors. I don't know what you think, Mrs. Dangerfield," he went on, addressing the back of that lady's head, as she sat talking with Mr. Ransome in the window, "but I always say that what makes the English women so deuced handsome is the outdoor life they lead."

"I quite agree with you, Mr. Fenton, and I'm going for a long walk," returned she, "so that I shall be transcendently beautiful for the dance this evening."

Mrs. Dangerfield had no idea of rattling about the country in the wagonette when she could avoid it by a ready lie.

"Are you going to have dancing this evening, Mary?" asked Mr. Fenton, with a scowl.

"I 'm going to have some fiddlers to play after dinner," she returned. "You insisted on my entertaining the aborigines, and I thought it would be the easiest way. And now, if you want to drive anywhere this afternoon you 'd better order the carriage, but I 'm sure I don't know who 'll go with you. I think the plans of the party are already made, especially Lucy's," she added, with her shrill little laugh. "Look at her blush! Harry, I did n't know you were such a Romeo."

"What's that? What 's that?" inquired Mr. Fenton, in his hasty way. "Where 's Lucy going?"

"Only to drive with me, Mr. Fenton. No living guardian could object to that, I should think," said Harry Lancet.

"I don't know about that, sir," returned Mr. Fenton. "You can drink, and gamble, and smoke cigarettes, and dance attendance on married women, but I very much doubt if you can drive, sir. I think Miss Lucy had better come to the farm with me. I want to

have a look at the colts. Do you want to see them, Grifforth?"

Mr. Grifforth said he did, and it presently appeared that Miss Wilson wanted to see the colts, too, and that Mr. Middleton sighed for a sight of the farm; so the wagonette was ordered, and the women went upstairs to put on their hats and coats.

"Where 's *my* lady?" asked Harry Lancet, sauntering out of the smoking-room as the sound of wheels died away down the avenue, and meeting his hostess in the hall.

"She begs you to excuse her, but she thought her guardian objected to her driving with you, and she has gone in the wagonette," said Mrs. Fenton, smiling maliciously in his astonished face. "You 'll have to drive with me instead."

"Well! By! Jupiter!" said Mr. Lancet, in three distinct exclamations. "The girl beats me. Look here, Mrs. Fenton, I 'm not going to put up with it, you know; Middleton can't have it all his own way. Let me take her in to dinner to-night, will you?"

"What under the sun has the girl done to

you all?" cried Mrs. Fenton. "You were n't mad about her yesterday."

"Oh, nothing, nothing," stammered Mr. Lancet; "she is a new type, you know, and — well, she looked rather pretty last evening."

Miss Doll certainly did not look pretty when she returned from her drive. Her hair was blown about her little face in wisps, and she was pinched with the cold, having forgotten to take with her the formless garment which had excited Mr. Lancet's derision.

She came timidly to knock at Miss Wilson's door at dressing time. Might she warm herself again at the fire? And, oh! would Miss Wilson do her hair again as beautifully as she had done it last night?

Miss Wilson did it as beautifully, if not as amiably, and Miss Doll crept back to her own room.

Harry Lancet took her in to dinner, which was a large one, owing to the entertaining of the aborigines, but though she talked and laughed naturally enough with him, and begged his forgiveness very prettily for deserting him in the afternoon, he could not flatter

himself that he had advanced at all in her good graces. When Mrs. Fenton marshalled the women out of the dining-room, he was as puzzled as he had ever been in his life.

"I can't make that little girl out," he said to Grifforth, near whom he had pulled up his chair.

"I'm going to dance the cotillion with her this evening," said Frank, lighting his cigarette.

At this moment they were joined by Ransome, who had been upstairs to his room for a forgotten cigar-case.

"I've just seen the most extraordinary thing!" he exclaimed, joining them. "When I passed through the hall just now — the women are in the drawing-room, you know — I saw that quiet little person, Miss Doll ——"

"Yes! yes!" cried the other two, eagerly, as he paused to light his cigar.

"— and Middleton, you know, standing together at the foot of the stairs. As I came toward them he was giving her a parcel wrapped in white paper, and I heard him say: 'I got them for you yesterday. They were in my valise, you know. I'm so sorry I forgot to

give them to you before dinner.' And she said: 'Never mind, I'll go up and put them on now. I hope these will match my dress; the others don't at all.' Just then they saw me, and she ran upstairs, and he sauntered off to the conservatory."

"Well," said Harry, "what's extraordinary about that?"

"I went upstairs slowly," continued Ransome, in his heavy way, "and on the top step I saw something pink, lying in a little heap."

"Miss Doll in a fainting fit?" suggested Harry.

"I picked it up," went on Ransome, solemnly, quite ignoring the interruption. "It was a pink silk stocking!"

"Well, what of it?" said Frank Grifforth.

"What of it?" echoed Ransome.

"You don't think it odd that Middleton should supply Miss Doll with pink silk stockings?"

"How do you know it was hers?"

"I met her coming back to look for it, with the mate in her hand."

"And what did you do?" cried Harry, chuckling.

"I gave it to her, of course, and I asked if I might take her to supper to-night."

"He's a millionaire, Frank," said Harry, feigning despair. "There's no chance for you and me."

Never had Miss Doll spent so pleasant an evening. She danced till the pink silk stockings should have been full of holes. Her partner, Mr. Grifforth, introduced every man he knew and several he did not know to her. Harry Lancet brought her favours with both hands. Mr. Ransome took her to supper, and Fred Middleton was never far from her side.

"Well, what do you think now?" said Miss Wilson, as she and her hostess stood yawning near the fireplace as the last guest drove away. "I declare I can't understand it."

Mrs. Dangerfield, who was always sure of her own empire whenever she chose to exert herself, laughed knowingly and said that timid Lucy was a dear little thing, and she meant to see a great deal of her that Winter.

"What's become of her now?" inquired Mrs. Fenton.

"Meaning me, Mrs. Fenton?" said Miss

Doll's voice at her elbow. "I 've never had such a good time in all my life. I feel as if I never wanted to stop dancing. Has n't it been delightful?"

"I 'm glad you enjoyed it," returned her hostess, a trifle coldly, "but I think we have done quite enough dancing for one nighs, and had better go to bed now, don't you?"

Miss Doll acquiesced with a gentle smile, and with general good-nights the house-party dispersed.

About a quarter of an hour later it occurred to Miss Wilson, who was really a good-natured woman, that she had dismissed the sleepy house-maid without sending her to unlace Miss Doll's dress; so, slipping into her dressing-gown, she went softly down the hall to Lucy's room to offer any assistance that might be required. She knocked softly at first, fearing Lucy might be asleep. Something moved with a squeak in the room, and a voice of suppressed annoyance said: "I 'll get a feather and some oil, and oil that door to-morrow," to which Lucy's voice replied: "Hush! I think someone knocked."

Miss Wilson knocked louder, and after an

appreciable pause, during which stealthy sounds died away, Lucy said, "Come in."

She was standing in the corner of the room, her cheeks flushed, her eyes downcast and her fingers nervously busy with some favours she was unpinning from her dress.

"I came to see if you wanted your dress unlaced," said Edith. "I quite forgot to send the maid to you."

"Oh, thank you," said Miss Doll; "I've only got it half-undone — if you would be so good." She moved forward as she spoke. A snap was heard; part of Miss Doll's lacer still dangled from her half-unfastened bodice as she turned her back to Edith. The other piece hung quivering from the crack of the door near which she had been standing, and that door led into the adjoining room.

"Your lacer is broken," said Miss Wilson, drily.

"I thought I heard something snap," returned Miss Doll, and not another word was spoken until Edith turned to go.

"Who has the room on that side?" she asked, pointing to the door where the pink lacer still swung.

"Mr. Middleton, I believe," said Miss Doll, without looking up. "Good-night."

"Mary!" cried Edith Wilson the next morning, meeting Mrs. Fenton hurrying from her room, "I must tell you something about Miss Doll —"

"Miss Doll, indeed!" fairly screamed Mrs. Fenton. "Read that!" and thrusting a note into her friend's hand, she collapsed into the nearest chair.

The note said:

DEAR MRS. FENTON, — I don't know how to tell my guardian — I've tried a great many times, but I am so afraid of him — will you tell him that Mr. Middleton and I are married? I think Miss Wilson suspected it last evening, and so I thought I had better confide in you. We were married before he went with his regiment to Puerto Rico. I feared he might be wounded and want me to go to him, and I could not bear to think that I had no right to do so.

We have both gone to town by the morning train, but if my guardian forgives me, we could come back this afternoon. Please telegraph.

Yours affectionately,

LUCY MIDDLETON.

III

MY NIECE, MRS. DOVE

III

MY NIECE, MRS. DOVE

WHEN Amelia first proposed my going abroad with her I made some faint resistance. I knew it would be ineffectual, but I felt it was due to myself.

"I 'm too old," cried I.

"You are at the nicest middle age in the world," said Amelia, patting my hand, "and you are the sweetest and handsomest gray-haired lady in the land, and I do so love to be with you."

"Too old, I mean, to enjoy flying about the Continent as you do, my dear," I continued hastily, knowing that my downfall was certain, but making a show of firmness.

"But you need n't fly about, dear Aunty, not once. You know you will enjoy the voyage because you are such a wonderfully good sailor, and you have never been by the Southern route. Then, when we get to the

other side, you shall just settle down in some beautiful, quiet place, with the children to amuse you — they are such ducks ! — and I 'll do the flying about by myself," said Amelia, with an air of engaging virtue.

It had occurred to me that I might be of some use to my niece beside the comfort she derived from the society of the " handsomest gray-haired lady in the land." Now everything was explained.

" So the children are to go ! " I said.

" Yes," answered Mrs. Dove, the thoughtfully tender expression of the true mother stealing over her face. " I could n't be separated from them for a whole Summer. You don't know what they are to me, dear Aunty. Nobody does."

I did not remind Amelia that she had found it quite possible to bear a whole Winter's separation from the children, during which time their grandmother had had the entire charge of them. Her great blue eyes would have filled with tears at the recollection of the suffering she had secretly endured while ostensibly leading a life of moderate gaiety at Aiken.

Mr. Dove had been dead for a little more than a year. He had succumbed to a violent cold caught while camping out in the Adirondacks. Amelia, who had nursed him with the greatest devotion, now bore his loss with amazing fortitude, and administered the small property left to her with judicious care.

"Won't it be rather an expensive trip?" I ventured, not finding a suitable reply to my niece's last remark.

"Well, you know I must go somewhere for the Summer," said Amelia, clasping her hands behind her smooth, golden head. "I know it would have been a comfort to mamma if she could have kept the children, but Susie and Tom —" Amelia's sister and her husband — "got it into their heads that she really ought to have some change, so they absolutely insisted upon her spending the hot months with them at Bar Harbor, and, as the house is too small to take in the children, I thought it would be better to take them abroad with me. They are such companions to me, Aunt Charlotte; I miss them so when I am away from them."

"Why not stay here with them?" I sug-

gested, knowing that the reasons against it would be admirable.

"Oh, I could n't do that, dear Aunty. Where could I go? I can't bear the mountains since — since poor Arthur's death, you know, and the seaside places in this country are horrid — except Newport, where I could not go this year. We 'll go to the Italian lakes, you and I, Aunty, when it really gets hot, and have a delicious time all to ourselves. I 'm very rich just now, really, and you always have plenty of money."

"What makes you so rich?" I demanded, with some curiosity, for Amelia did not often appear satisfied with the state of her finances.

"Well, you see, I have been speculating a little," returned my niece, confidentially. "At least, dear old Phœnix Morman did it for me. He is so kind! I told him I wanted to make some extra pennies in order to go abroad and live riotously, and he said he would make them for me. It was something he knew of that was so *sure* to turn out well that he did not even disturb my investments to get the money. He just lent it to me himself, and it turned out splendidly. He and I both made

a great deal. Isn't it fun? He's going out on the vessel we go on, Aunty. Aren't you glad? He has a wonderful mind, and is such an interesting man. We have long talks together about all sorts of things."

Phœnix Morman's mind being one of the most marvellous money-making machines in the country, and Amelia's really by no means the least, I could imagine their long talks to be well worth listening to. The idea was amusing.

"The Bishop of Stillpenny is going over, too," went on Mrs. Dove, "and Mrs. Crosier, I suppose. Oh! and poor Mr. Wister, you know, whose wife died not long ago. They say he behaved wonderfully during her long illness. He is one of the most able and distinguished men of the day — isn't he, Aunt Charlotte? — besides being one of the richest."

"I believe so, my dear," I answered. "I never met him."

"Poor Aunty!" cried Amelia, rising and stealing a gentle arm round my neck. "You have led a very shut-up life lately. Come abroad with me and see new places and people.

You don't know what else to do with yourself, do you, dear? You shall have half my cabin, and I'll be so good to you, and you will be such a comfort to me."

So I yielded.

It was a warm day in the early part of April when we started. It had in some way been brought to my mind that by taking a four-wheeled cab and stopping at the house for the children, their nurse and Amelia's maid, I should be doing what was greatly to my own advantage. Accordingly, I stopped before the abode of my niece at the hour named, and beheld the noses of Master Theodore and Miss Alicia Dove flattened against the drawing-room window in earnest watching for my approach. They disappeared from the window to burst out of the door as soon as it was opened, and immediately clambered into the carriage, volubly explaining to me that their mamma had gone out to do some shopping, but would join us on the dock at Hoboken, from which place our vessel sailed.

My heart sank. Amelia never hurried herself, and had once or twice been known

to miss trains and boats altogether. The nurse, who had followed the children, reassured me a little.

"Madame had found herself obliged to attend to some forgotten business, but had left word that she should be at the dock before us — long before us."

Amelia's maid appeared with umbrella, bag, cloak, and a pink pillow, without which Mrs. Dove never travelled. The various other bags and bundles appertaining to the party were put in, and we rumbled away from the door.

Theodore and Alicia sat by me on the back seat, Theodore, by reason of his more mature age, next the window. They were very quiet and well behaved, and with their golden hair and white apparel seemed quite fitted to take their place among cherubs at a moment's notice.

"My mamma has to work very hard for such a little woman," said Theodore, reflectively, after a long silence.

"Wery hard," returned Alicia, with a sigh; "almost as hard as cook. But cook's going to be married to Officer Denny soon, and then

she won't have to work no more, she says. Could mamma marry an officer, Aunt Charlotte?"

"She could," said I, briefly, "but I don't think it would please her. Look out of the window, Alicia. There's a fluffy white dog on the steps of that house."

"My mamma is going to take Nips abroad with her," declared Theodore. Nips was Amelia's bull terrier. "He's out in the carriage with her now."

"I trust you are mistaken, Theodore," I cried, in some dismay, for I did not relish Nips as a travelling companion.

"No, indeed," he returned, wagging his head solemnly. "What was it they said at afternoon tea yesterday, Alicia? When Mr. Raymond was there, you know."

"'You are *such* a little woman to work so hard,'" quoted Alicia, absently, her attention absorbed by an organ-grinder.

"No — I said that to Aunt Charlotte already," cried her brother, with the air of having discharged himself of a holiday task. "I mean about Nips. Oh, I know. He said, 'Let me keep Nips for you; I want to keep

something of yours.' And mamma said, 'No, you don't love Nips,' and he said ——"

"Never mind, Theodore," I interposed hastily. "Here we are at the ferry. Don't you want to pay for me?"

Mr. Raymond had adored Amelia for so long that his speeches could be foretold without much difficulty. The nurse and the maid exchanged demure glances.

The crossing did not take much time, and we had only a short distance to drive before we reached our destination.

Amelia was not there, of course. I searched the dock with my eyes as we drove along. I swept the deck with nervous glances. As soon as I could free myself from the children I went down to the cabin which I had been told I was to share with my niece. My own steamer trunk stared me in the face, and my bag, umbrella, and rug had already been conveyed there by a nimble steward, but of Amelia's numerous belongings there was no trace. Even Nips, as a sign that his mistress had not deserted me — even that abominable, snorting bull terrier would have been a comfort now.

The children, who had a cabin near by, chose

this moment to escape from their nurse and burst in upon me with a torrent of questions.

Was that where I was going to sleep? Did ships always have round windows? Was the captain *ever* seasick? When would they be seasick? Theodore would rather have the "ammonia," really, than be seasick, but Alicia didn't mind, because she was only a girl.

I felt that I could cheerfully endure both nausea and the "ammonia," little as I knew of that unusual disease, if only Amelia would appear. She was so superbly capable of arriving too late and calmly taking the next steamer.

"Let us go on deck, my dears," I said anxiously, taking Alicia's hand, "and watch for your mother. Your nurse and Francine will manage better down here without you, I dare say."

"My mamma will not come for a long time, I am sure," returned Theodore, skipping ahead; "she is most un-punk-shial. Grandmamma often says so to her."

As we passed through the saloon I noticed no less than three enormous boxes of flowers, two baskets of fruit, a large box from Maillard's, and a pile of books, all bearing the name

of Mrs. Dove, and it comforted me vaguely to see these evidences of Amelia's expected arrival. A steward was staggering along with a wooden box, apparently containing champagne, and marked, I had no manner of doubt, with my niece's name. Theodore's head, which he carried rather low, the better to observe the number of skips he could accommodate to the pattern of the carpet, came into violent contact with this box, and in the momentary pause that ensued I verified my surmises and noticed, besides, that the card tacked on the case bore the "compliments" of Phœnix Morman.

We went up on deck, Theodore somewhat subdued in spirit and Alicia clinging to my hand. The utmost bustle and confusion reigned. Sailors and stewards passed swiftly to and fro, orders were shouted, groups of people gathered and dissolved in front of us. I saw the Bishop of Stillpenny and Mrs. Crosier arriving with Mr. Morman in his beautifully appointed carriage. Their appearance was most impressive as they descended from the vehicle and mounted the gangplank—the Bishop all blandness, from the bend of his large white nose to the curve of the handsome

calf his gaiter so well displayed, and Mrs. Crosier carrying her small person as upright as a dart. Behind them Mr. Morman's huge figure and rugged, clever face arrested the attention suddenly as one realised how like he was to the somewhat unflattering caricatures the papers occasionally ventured to print of him.

A few minutes later the shore whistle was blown, and people began to take their departure. I was nearly frantic.

"Theodore," said I, "if your mother does not come I am going to get off this vessel."

Alicia looked very doleful. "*We* always has to stay until mamma comes," she said, with the patience of long habit.

At this instant a neat brougham drove down to the pier, and out of it stepped Amelia, followed by Mr. Raymond, laden with packages and flowers. Nips bundled up the gangplank ahead of them.

"Upon my word, Amelia," I cried, on the verge of nervous tears, "I should have been off this ship in another moment. I really thought something must have happened to you."

"Oh, no, dear Aunty," returned Mrs. Dove, tranquilly. "I never am very early, you know, but I don't often miss things, do I, Ned?" turning to Mr. Raymond. "I had a great deal to do this morning, so I told Ned to send the brougham for me, and as he came with it I went and chose some horses for him, and such a pretty pony for you, Theodore — Mr. Raymond is going to keep it for you till we come back in the Autumn — and for you, too, my bird, my dear, sweet little yellow-haired Alicia, the tiniest pony you ever saw; and you shall both come out riding with your poor old mother, to take care of her." Amelia knelt down on the deck and hugged the children. "Then I went to get a copy of Dante in the original, Aunt Charlotte," she went on, looking up at me from the charming position she had unconsciously assumed, "and some Italian books — grammars and things, you know. I am going to study all the way over. And then Ned ——"

"Ned ought to be going, if he will forgive me for saying so," I cried, in an agony. "They are taking away the gangplank." And so they were.

"Oh, he can go back with the pilot," said Amelia, rising. "Have you seen Mr. Morman, Aunty, or the Crosiers? And do tell me, how does poor Mr. Wister look?"

"I really don't know," said I, rather crossly. "I have not seen him."

"Oh, I do hope he is on board," said Mrs. Dove. "I want you to meet him."

Some time later Amelia followed me to my cabin, where I had retired to escape the contemplation of Mr. Raymond's silent agony of farewell.

"Ned 's gone," she said. "Poor old Ned! he is good, but so dull! Aunt Charlotte, I am going to leave you this whole stateroom to your own self. It seems that Mrs. Morman meant to come, and then did not at the last moment, and dear old Phœnix insists upon my taking her room. It 's a deck room, you know. I could n't have afforded it myself, but, as he says, why not occupy it, when it 's just standing there empty? You don't mind, do you, Aunty? I 'll leave you Nips if you are afraid to be alone."

"I don't mind being alone, thank you," said I, hastily. "And they would n't allow

you to leave Nips in this part of the boat."

"I'll make Mr. Morman see the Captain about it," said Amelia. "I think I'd feel happier about both of you if you were together. I wonder where my birds are — are n't they the dearest little creatures in the world? Theodore was walking up and down the deck with the Bishop, and Alicia was sitting on Mrs. Crosier's lap when I came down. Everyone loves the children; they are so serious; they are companions to anybody, the funny little owls!"

I suggested going up on deck to fetch the funny little owls before the long, lazy Atlantic swell began to have any effect upon them.

"I have an idea they will be good sailors, like you and me, Aunty," said Amelia, "but don't let me keep you if you want to go up. They will be so pleased to see you! I must stay and speak to Francine about some things I want got out of my trunk."

The first people I saw as I stepped out into the fresh air were Mrs. Crosier and Alicia, cosily ensconced in the same chair. They

welcomed me cordially and invited me to sit near them.

"This is the most quaintly solemn child I ever saw," remarked Mrs. Crosier to me. "And the boy is delightful." Theodore here passed us, in earnest conversation with the Bishop. "Their mother seems to have been very particular about their bringing up."

"She selected very good people for them to be with whenever her duties called her elsewhere," I returned cautiously. "Alicia, my dear, do you feel at all seasick?"

Alicia shook her head. "No, Aunt Charlotte, I don't think so, but I erlieve Theodore does, for he made a funny face just now — just like those gentlemen in the particular partoons [political cartoons] Nanna shows us in the amusin' papers."

"Why does n't he go downstairs, then?" said I.

"Oh, mamma promised him he might say his evening hymn to that Bishop — Mr. Bishop, I mean," returned Alicia, "and he does n't think it 's late enough yet to begin."

As she spoke Theodore passed again, looking pale and determined.

"Don't you want to come with me and see whether we can find your mother's stateroom, Theodore?" I asked.

"In a few minutes, Aunt Charlotte," he returned heroically; "as soon as I've said 'For those in peril on the sea.' Is it too soon to say it?" he added, turning to the Bishop.

"Not at all too soon, I should say," answered the Bishop, laughing outright. So Theodore took off his hat and recited the whole hymn with much gravity, Alicia echoing such words as she could catch. He then put his cold little hand in mine, bowed to the company and suffered me to lead him away.

I found Amelia without much difficulty. She had the largest and most beautifully decorated cabin on the boat. It was filled with flowers, books lay on the sofa, the box of candy had been opened, and a delicate little pair of tongs marked the especial compartment to which Mrs. Dove's attention had last been directed. Francine and a steward were on their knees trying to pull out the steamer trunk, which had got caught under the berth. I wondered how long Amelia had known she

was to occupy these palatial quarters. I remembered that the trunk had never been in my cabin at all.

"Theodore feels ill," said I, addressing my niece's back as she stood in front of the glass smoothing her hair.

"Does he?" cried Amelia, turning round. She lifted the boy in her arms, pushing the books onto the floor as she laid him on the sofa. "Poor little Theodore! What shall I give him, Aunty? Why, he's quite cold. Dear chick! Mamma is so sorry!" She smoothed the hair away from his forehead and kissed him tenderly.

"I feel better now I am flat," remarked the young gentleman, "and I said my hymn to the Bishop before I came away."

"Did you, my sweet?" said his mother. "That was so good in you. Is n't he a duck, Aunt Charlotte?"

"He is," I returned absently. "Amelia, when did Mr. Morman ask you to take this cabin? After you came on board?"

"Oh, no; he spoke to me about it the other evening when I dined with him at the Waldorf," said Amelia, simply.

At this point Alicia appeared, to announce that she had lost her hat overboard. Mrs. Crosier, who accompanied her, appeared to feel rather guilty about the accident and apologised at some length for her negligence, but Amelia's gentleness blamed nobody. She only said, in her caressing way, that they must borrow one of the sailors' hats for Alicia if she lost any more of her own.

Mrs. Crosier was charmed with her, and the two paced the deck for an hour or more, while Francine arranged the contents of the trunk and I told the children stories.

When, at length, they consented to go down to their cabin, and I was free to join Amelia, the Bishop's wife had left her, and she was in earnest conversation with a short, fat, round-eyed little woman, not unlike a frog in a black dress, from whom she separated as I came toward them.

"That 's Mrs. Robberly, the dressmaker," she remarked, taking my arm. "Such a funny old woman! She has just offered to make me some gowns for nothing if I will choose one or two good models for her as we come back through Paris; wear them once or

twice, you know, and bring them in for her. Poor old thing! I think it would be kind of me to help her, don't you, Aunt Charlotte? People have such a hard struggle to live in these days. I don't care about clothes myself, but one must be decently dressed, and, as I am not rich, I suppose I ought to be glad to get my frocks as cheaply as possible."

"Who pays for the model gowns?" I inquired, with some curiosity.

"Oh, Mrs. Robberly does," said Amelia, "I could n't afford it. Shall we go and dress for dinner now, Aunty? I am really hungry. And, as you go down, will you stop and see if the children are all right? I am anxious about Theodore."

But later, when I attempted to report to Amelia — across the table, where she sat between the Captain and Mr. Morman — that her maternal anxieties were needless, I found it impossible to engage her attention, so gravely absorbed and intelligently interested did she appear in the discussion of wireless telegraphy which was taking place between her two neighbours.

When I bade her good-night she was read-

ing Dante with the Bishop, but she had not been unmindful of my comfort. Nips was asleep in the middle of my berth, and the cabin resounded with his snores.

We ran into a storm that night, and for some days afterward were so tossed about that I took the precaution to stay in my berth, not on account of seasickness, but because I felt that there was great danger of breaking some of my elderly bones if I got up. Most of the passengers on the ship followed my example, but not so Amelia. She was up and about as usual. She used to come in to see me, with her hair glistening with the salt spray and her face as pink as a rose.

"It is so marvellous on deck, Aunty," she said, one day, nestling into a corner of the sofa. "Such a grand sight! Mr. Morman and I have been walking up and down for an hour. Those great, hungry, gray waves racing after us, and the flashes of white spray flying past against the blackness of the sky. The sea is wonderful, is n't it? You can think great thoughts and feel great feelings when you are face to face with a power like that. I seemed so little, so little; and all

my small hopes and ambitions were swept away like straws in the wind. That 's a very pretty dressing-sacque you have on, you dear, nice lady, and what quantities of real lace they trimmed it with! That 's one of the very few extravagances I permit myself, real lace, — it is so ladylike. Mr. Morman gave me a beautiful black lace fan for my birthday. He is a wonderful man, Aunt Charlotte. So big, you know; such a large nature! — though, perhaps, not quite so noble as Mr. Wister's. I can't imagine Mr. Morman putting his sorrow behind him and taking up life again in the wonderful way Mr. Wister has. And he does n't understand one so quickly."

"Bless my soul!" said I. "I forgot all about Mr. Wister. Surely he was n't at table the first night out? I don't think I saw him."

"No," said Amelia. "He sprained his ankle just before we sailed, and he has been confined to his cabin, poor dear! I sent him down a lot of fruit and books when I heard of it, and I got such a nice note from him. He likes just the things I like; and what an acute mind he has! I go and talk to him every day now, I and Mr. Morman, who insists upon

chaperoning me. Dear old Phœnix! It's very kind of him, but, somehow, I think we should get on better without him. He is a little possessive, you know. He seems to feel that I am under his charge, which is so ridiculous. I must give him a hint about it. Because a person is generous and likes to give pretty things and make life easy for people, is no reason why he should be dictatorial, is it?"

"Really," I exclaimed, "I think Mr. Morman is entirely right to consider it not quite nice for you to go and sit with Mr. Wister alone."

"Do you, dear?" said Amelia, kissing me. "How old-fashioned you are! As if anything a nice woman did could be otherwise than nice! The only thing to be is just true and simple," continued Mrs. Dove, reflectively, "and then let people say what they please. I am sure Mr. Wister does not misunderstand. Though I don't think he is very sympathetic with Mr. Morman. What a rare thing perfect sympathy is, especially between men!"

"How are the children?" I asked abruptly, for I cannot always breathe in those lofty heights to which Amelia soars.

"Oh, poor little birds, they were very ill for ever so long," returned she, "and Theodore did nothing but groan, 'Oh, this is agony,' but Alicia slept nearly all the time. Their nurse was ill, too, and so was Francine. I had to get Mr. Morman to lace my——"

"What?" cried I, as she paused. Amelia's unconventionality was a trifle alarming.

"— boots every morning," continued my niece, struggling with a yawn. "Excuse me, Aunt Charlotte, I am sleepy because I was up late last night with a poor woman in the second cabin who was awfully ill. The stewardesses were too busy to attend to her, so I went. I think she has got pneumonia. I had a consultation with the doctor about her."

"Is there nothing we can do?" I asked.

"No, she is getting every care now. I paid a woman to look after her. I think we ought to help everybody we can. It *is* a privilege to be allowed to help other people."

"Let me enjoy it too, then. You 'll find my purse in that bag over there."

"You are awfully good, dear Aunty, but indeed it is not necessary. Mr. Morman gave most generously the moment I mentioned the

case to him. I had meant to give a little, too, for I played écarté with him last evening after dinner, and it seemed only right to give some of my winnings, but he would not let me."

"Did you win much?" I asked.

But Amelia had left the room, and I heard her voice cooing and laughing in the sweetest way with the children in the neighbouring cabin.

The next day was calm enough to tempt me up on deck, and at about twelve o'clock one morning I was walking toward the open door of Amelia's gorgeous stateroom. I may be old-fashioned, as my niece says, but I do not, and never shall, think it proper for a young woman to receive persons of the opposite sex in her room, especially when she is not yet up. Amelia looked like a Madonna. She had a blue ribbon in her hair, a wonderful lace dressing-sacque over her wonderful lace night-gown, and a beautiful blue silk cover thrown over her bed, but, all the same, she was in bed, and I was amazed when I found that the Bishop of Stillpenny was playing at chess with her.

"Good-morning, Aunt Charlotte. Is n't the Bishop good?" cried Amelia, pausing with

her white hand on an even pinker bishop than Joseph of Stillpenny. "I was wretched this morning, and so lonely, and when he passed the door I could not resist calling him, and he has been comforting me ever since. It must be so glorious to know that wherever you go you bring comfort."

"It would be very glorious if I could hope it were so," said the Bishop, in his rolling, sonorous voice. "Ah, my dear child, I wish it were in my power to give you real comfort. Checkmate! So it is. I must go to Mrs. Crosier."

"We were talking of the impossibility of earthly relations beyond the grave, and of—of poor Arthur, you know," said Amelia to me. "I have always blamed myself that I insisted upon going to the Adirondacks that summer. Perhaps I was wrong to try to retrench. It was *his* money, of course. Well! I am glad he had the good of it while he was alive."

As I remembered it, Arthur Dove's money had flown chiefly in the keeping up of an establishment for the amusement of Amelia and the use of her friends, but I knew Amelia did not think so.

"Sometimes," she continued, "I feel as if I ought to do something for the children. Women do make money. They keep shops, or they write, or they —"

"Or they marry rich husbands," I suggested, idly.

"Oh, Aunt Charlotte, dear!" cried Amelia. "How can you say such a — forgive me — coarse thing to me? *I never* could marry again after —" Her eyes filled with tears.

I kissed her and begged her forgiveness, assuring her that I had meant nothing personal.

"I 'm sure you did n't, dear, only there are some things one can't bear to have said," Amelia answered. "Now, we will forget all about it. Did you see the children this morning? They are with Mrs. Crosier, I suppose. Poor Alicia! Her nurse tells me it was her only hat that was lost overboard. I really think her grandmother might have allowed her another, the poor mite. And oh, Aunty, why did you banish Nips? Theodore tells me he is living with the cook."

"I hope he is," said I, "and that he is enjoying a greater freedom in breathing than he

attained in the limited air space of my cabin. I think he 's better off where he is."

"I must go and see him when I get up," said Amelia. "Please don't go, Aunty. Mr. Morman and Mr. Wister are coming to teach me bridge-whist directly, and we must have a fourth. I hope they will get on well to-day."

Mr. Wister was a tall, gray-haired, fine-looking man, with a splendid figure. His nose was clever; his eyes, if anything, a little close together. His manners were charming, suave and diplomatic, and his voice of a most agreeable quality. A greater contrast to the rugged-featured red face, brilliant, fierce eyes and stern, abrupt manner of Phœnix Morman it would be difficult to imagine. It appeared to me they did not like each other.

Amelia was wonderful with them both. Her dove-like eyes fixed first upon one and then upon the other; she followed their every word of instruction. It occurred to me that her mastery of the game was astonishing for a beginner; certainly her luck was, and to my "old-fashioned" notions the stakes were high. But I was beyond protesting.

At the end of a game we suddenly heard a

slight commotion on deck, and, on sending to inquire the cause, learned that we were in sight of the Azores.

Amelia was out of bed in an instant.

"Oh, give me my dressing-gown, Mr. Morman, like a dear," she cried, holding out her hand for a blue-silk and white lace garment that hung over a chair. "And, Mr. Wister, do find my slippers! I must see some land after all these watery days! I can't wait!"

She thrust herself into the things, and, followed by the gentlemen, pattered out on deck before I could recover the power of speech.

She was back in an instant.

"I must dress, Aunty. We shall be at anchor before long, and I mean to go on shore."

"Amelia, my dear," I said, seriously, "you really ought to be ashamed of yourself! What could those men have thought of you? I — you — my dear — you have no idea how *very* little you appeared to have on."

"Dear Aunt Charlotte," she returned, "Mr. Wister and Mr. Morman are gentle-

men, and consequently could think nothing disagreeable of me. I am not ashamed of myself, but I am ashamed of you for attaching such unpleasant importance to such a simple thing. I am afraid we differ very greatly in our ideas on these matters." And such was her dignity that I went out from her presence abashed.

During the days of the storm Amelia had been most nautical in her appearance. A little yachting cap of Theodore's had adorned her golden head, and a short blue serge skirt and a double-breasted jacket with gold buttons showed off her trim figure to great advantage. To-day, however, when, after keeping us waiting for some time, she stepped into the boat to go ashore, she looked like a little girl going to a garden party. A vision in white she was, crowned with a hat of apple blossoms and pink ribbons. Alicia, whose head had been somewhat ruthlessly thrust into an old scarlet Tam-o'-Shanter of her brother's, admired her mother exceedingly. So, apparently, did Mr. Wister, who watched our departure with an inscrutable smile.

"Is n't my mamma pretty?" Alicia asked,

confidentially. "I think she is the very prettiest lady in the world."

Amelia, who was sitting next to her, turned and kissed the child. "What should I do without you, my precious bird?" she said. "You look rather hot in that Tam, Alicia. Mamma must give you this hat, must n't she, when we get to the places where little girls need hats? Theodore, you will splash Mrs. Crosier if you fall into the water. Just hold him for me, dear Mr. Morman. What a pity Mr. Wister's ankle is n't well enough to let him come on shore! This is a beautiful place. Look! there's a thick hedge of camelias in that garden on the hill."

We were being rowed into the tiny crescent-shaped harbour of Ponte del Garda, on the island of San Miguel. A house curiously covered with light blue tiles, like a high mantelpiece, faced us, but for the most part the buildings were low, two stories being the average of the better class of them. We landed at some steps and walked under an arcade of white arches to the principal street. Amelia was in ecstasies. The little narrow ways, the tiny shops, the bullocks that dragged

the water-barrels through the streets (and to avoid which we had to flatten ourselves against the walls of the houses) were all enchanting to her. And when we came to the little bull-ring, for all the world like the one in "Carmen," she could hardly contain herself. She wanted to leave the steamer then and there, she said, and convey her party to the small English hotel, where, much to his surprise, Phœnix Morman had found two friends of his were staying. She wished, she declared, to explore not only San Miguel but every single island of the beautiful group.

Mr. Morman at once offered to stay with her, and she thanked him with a look of the most angelic renunciation.

"I believe you really would," said she, caressingly. "You are so unselfish. Oh, Mr. Morman, what a friend you are!"

"You little witch," he returned, endeavouring to lower his usually unreserved tones. "Be careful how you play with me! There is very little I would not do for you. But don't presume too far upon my *friendship*."

Amelia looked detached and pensive, as if in contemplation of some great moral problem,

and, calling Theodore to her side, asked him if he had ever seen so pretty a place.

Theodore, however, was unimpressed by the beauties of the white convent with heavy black lava trimmings which we were passing at the moment. He said he did not care much for "abroad," and that he would rather see a Broadway cable car than anything his mother could show him in that place.

"You will see trolleys when you get to Genoa," said Amelia, laughing, and she walked on with Mr. Morman and left the children to Mrs. Crosier and me. She did not rejoin us for some time.

It had been decided that a party of us were to dine at the little hotel in the town. Mr. Morman gave the dinner, and Amelia, of course, was to be the chief guest, but to my surprise she complained of being very tired and declared her intention of going back to the ship with the children. As the fatigues of the day had given me a violent headache, I gladly seized the opportunity of accompanying her, at which she protested a little.

"Mr. Morman will be so disappointed that you can't go to his dinner!" she said.

"You and the Crosiers, and that funny little Englishman and his wife whom we met at the hotel, were to be his only guests. I am awfully sorry I have had to give out, but I really am tired and must rest. Perhaps I 'll be able to come back after dinner. The Captain said we did not start again till eleven o'clock. It must be lovely here by moonlight. Aunty, do you think I *could* take Francine and stay here, just till the next steamer comes, while you and the children went on to Genoa and waited for me? Mr. Morman wants me so much to do it, and I could be with his friends at the hotel, you know. Not that a woman in my position needs a chaperone. What do you think — could I do it?"

I stood aghast.

"I suppose you could, my dear," I gasped, "but I really hope you won't. I think it would be a mistake."

"Do you, Aunty? Then I 'll think it over; but it will be a great disappointment to Mr. Morman. He had quite set his heart upon it, and I should have enjoyed it very much. I was to give the orders about the

trunks when I went back now, and tell his servant and explain to the Captain."

"My dear Amelia," said I, "it would be a very wild thing to do. How do you know that you could get rooms in the next steamer that touches here, and, besides, consider the extra expense, if you won't consider appearances."

"I think there would be no difficulty about the rooms so late in the year," returned my niece, "and I suppose my part of the expense would be very little; but if you disapprove, dear, of course I will not do it. I never want to do what you really think wrong. Don't speak of it to Mr. Morman, will you? I will explain it to him, so that his feelings may not be hurt. Yes, I dare say — indeed, I am sure you are right. You are so wise, you don't know how I appreciate being with you. The world has an evil tongue. Does your head ache very badly?"

"Very badly," I returned.

"Then I won't tease you about another thing," said Amelia, petting me. "And I would n't leave you for a kingdom. And I 'll tell Mr. Morman that we must take our little trip another time — when I am old!"

The gentleman in question now approaching us, Amelia walked aside with him, looking up at him with her wonderful eyes and gesticulating in her pretty way. He did not seem displeased.

"Everything is arranged," she said to me as we rowed back to the ship, Alicia half asleep and Theodore wholly cross from fatigue. "And now you shall all go straight to bed, and I 'll come and tuck you up, and then I 'll have my little scrap of dinner and go to bed myself, for I am very tired."

The next morning she came into my cabin looking as clear-eyed and rosy as a child.

"There 's your coffee, Aunt Charlotte," she cried gaily. "And how is your headache? We have left the Azores far behind in the night, with all their quaint little towns and their windmills and their gardens. And we have left Mr. Morman behind, too!"

"So he made up his mind to stay, in spite of your refusal to join him in his expedition?" cried I, in some surprise.

"Well, not exactly that, Aunty," murmured Mrs. Dove, gently. "You know, I thought he really would want to see those beautiful islands some time, and it was a pity to miss

such a good opportunity, and his friends were there and all that, so, as I was afraid my change of mind might put him out of conceit with the plan, I did not tell him that I was not going. I just wrote him a little note when his man went ashore with the baggage. And then we steamed away into the night and left him. It was just as well, Aunt Charlotte; he was — I hardly know how to say it — " Amelia paused modestly — "but I think he was falling in love with me in his queer way. He said such odd things. It's curious, is n't it, Aunty, a man like that, with such a head for figures and a mind for finance ? "

" To say nothing of his being old enough to be your father, and having a wife and children," cried I, indignantly.

" But that does n't stop men, Aunt Charlotte," said Amelia. " At least, not nowadays."

" Is that why you would n't dine with him ? " I inquired, curiously. Amelia's motives were always so interesting.

" Oh, no," she replied simply. " I could n't have dined with him because I had promised to dine on board with poor Mr. Wister."

L. of C.

The Crosiers appeared slightly puzzled by the unexplained eccentricity of Mr. Morman's behaviour. They were by way of travelling with him, and Mrs. Crosier confided to me that the Bishop was a good deal annoyed.

"So unlike Phœnix Morman to do a thing like that!" she said. "I never knew him to change his plans for anybody. He certainly gave me no reason to think he was going to stay. It is unaccountable."

"It is, indeed," I returned, guiltily, glancing involuntarily at Amelia, who was reading Italian under a parasol near by.

Mrs. Dove was demureness itself these days. She played with her children and read Dante — or said she did — with the Bishop, talked of the wonders of navigation with the Captain at meals, and devoted a great deal of her time to the solace of Mr. Wister. She and he used to play chess together every evening. She said that, nobly as he bore his sorrow, he did need sympathetic companionship, and he certainly appeared to get more of it now that Mr. Morman was no longer with us.

"You know he 'll be Ambassador to England some day, Aunt Charlotte; they say there is

little doubt of it. Rich, distinguished, noble-minded and handsome, and yet how hollow his life is! How paltry worldly advantages seem when one's heart is heavy! I know how it is. As I said to Mr. Wister last night, 'I have been through the depths that you have been through. We can be friends, the closest, dearest friends.'"

And that very evening I came upon the closest and dearest of friends sitting together on deck, and I am very much mistaken if the broken-hearted widower was not holding Amelia's hand.

Still, I was not prepared for the announcement that she made to me on the evening of the day before we were to touch at Gibraltar.

"Dear Aunt Charlotte," she said, "shall you really very much mind taking the children and Nips on to Genoa? I — the fact is that William —" here she blushed a little — "I mean Mr. Wister, is getting off at Gibraltar to take a trip through Spain, and as he cannot bear to part with me — he loves me very dearly, Aunty — I have agreed to go with him. The Bishop has consented to marry us to-morrow at the American Consul's at Gibraltar,

and we shall spend our honeymoon in Spain and afterward come and join you at the Italian lakes. I 'm afraid I have taken you rather by surprise, but the circumstances are not ordinary. Our position is unusual. It is a wonderful thing to feel that you suddenly have the whole comfort and happiness of another human being in your hands. I feel that I should not be doing right if I refused the responsibility that has been given me. I know I shall be a help to him. And my children — what a benefit such a man will be to them as they grow up! I shall go to Mrs. Robberly for part of my trousseau. How little we thought what this voyage would bring to pass, Aunt Charlotte!"

But I thought I might have guessed.

IV

AN UNFINISHED ELOPEMENT

IV

AN UNFINISHED ELOPEMENT

"I SUPPOSE you call this 'life'!" cried Beatrice, entering the house in a whirl of passion and petticoats. "Spending a whole afternoon in driving here and there, and leaving little cards at people's doors — " here she cast her parasol and card-case upon the floor, and the butler picked them up quite as if he were accustomed to it. "What is the good of it all, I ask you? Who's any the better for it? Certainly I am not."

"You don't seem much the better for it just now," said her friend, following her stormy progress through the drawing-room and out on to the enclosed piazza, "but you will be when you reflect that it's not waiting to be done to-morrow."

"That's just it. There's always something of that kind to be done to-morrow if it's not done to-day. What does it all amount to? It's so small, and petty, and

trifling! If I thought I were going to lead the same life and see the same people and do the same little things for the next twenty years I should go mad. Tea, please, Thompson, here on the piazza, and ask 'Toinette if she has any of the cakes I like. I don't know the name, but she will know if you say the cakes Mrs. Seaton likes. Poor Thompson! He looks badly, does n't he? I wonder if we keep him up too late at night! How ridiculous it is to sit up late boring one's self when one might be reading something delightful or improving one's mind — not that I have any mind, I don't mean that, but ——"

"I suppose Thompson has, and you are afraid that it will deteriorate while he is in your service."

"Well, I really think it might, you know," said Beatrice, whimsically. "We don't set him much of an example; always amusing ourselves all day long, and never doing anything for anybody."

"But I thought you said you were not amused."

"I 'm not. Jack really likes these people, but I can't get on with them. And I gener-

ally have to sit between the two stupidest men at the table. The other night, at that big dinner you made me go to, I had old Mr. Pipkin on one side and Mr. Simperson on the other. Mr. Pipkin told me nine different ways of preparing prawns, one of them the favourite way of the Prince of Wales, and Mr. Simperson talked of nothing but the women's dresses, and which women were rouged. I wished I had been rouged myself, I was so white with fatigue."

"You did n't look very happy," said Catherine, laughing.

"I suppose if there had been interesting people there they would not have wanted to talk to me," went on Beatrice, reflectively. "I 've got no conversation. But it does seem as if the usual kind might find something better than the weather, and golf, and bridge, and what people have on, and whether they do things they ought n't or not. I don't care. I wish they would, if it makes them happy. I dare say I 'd do them, too, I feel so wicked in my heart sometimes, only nobody would want to play with me, because I am so unattractive. Don't say anything. I don't want

to be contradicted. I hate compliments, and I hate looking like myself, too." Here she made a grimace indicative of great personal disapproval, and began to take off her hat. "Is my hair wild? You would tell me, would n't you? It 's foolish to care, but one likes to be neat. Well, I 'm not going upstairs to arrange it if it is n't. Dear little Catherine, your hair always looks so nice, and you are so good, are n't you?"

"I am a little more patient with Providence and people, if you mean that."

"I should think you were," said Beatrice. "I watched you on that awful occasion, and you were talking away so politely. I thought I should scream and kick the table over when we were only at soup, and I said to myself: 'Now I 'll just count three, and then I 'll see what I 'll do.'"

"And what did you do? I observed no commotion."

"Well, I made up my mind to behave myself by the time I got to three, but I shan't always. Some day I shall do something dreadful. You 'll see! Why, it 's perfectly ridiculous to expect a person to be

contented with a life like this. Oh, I know I 've got a great deal to be thankful for. I 've got a *husband* and a *home!* Whenever I complain everybody always says I 've got a charming husband and a delightful house; and so I have. Jack 's a great deal nicer than I am, I know, and the house keeps out the rain, now that we 've put a new roof on it. But you can't be madly exhilarated because you are protected from the weather and your husband does not beat you, can you?"

"I suppose some people might be," began Catherine, cautiously.

"Oh, I know. The poor creatures who are wretched and unhappy. I am wicked to complain about trifles, when so many people have real sorrows. You don't know how awfully I feel sometimes about having things — nice things and comfortable things — when I don't deserve them at all. I should like to give them away to those who need them more. I should, really. And it would n't be much of a sacrifice, either, for I don't think things mean much to me. Of course I 've never been without them, so I don't know. But some women care so much for detail. Now,

I don't care a bit, and I hate domestic questions about the servants and the horses and the cooking. What does it matter? I'd rather go out and scrub by the day than talk about it."

"I'm afraid I like contriving and arranging things. But so would you if you felt that other people's comfort depended upon your doing it," suggested Catherine, with amiable intention.

"That's just it. People do depend on you. Nobody depends on me. If they did, I think I'd be good. But everyone does things so much better than I do them. Why, I can't even take care of Jack when he's ill. I don't like men to be ill, ever, you know, and I go to the door and say: 'Don't you think you are a great deal better now? Oh, you must be!' And when he says he is n't, it makes me furious. The last time he was ill in town we had asked some people to dine and go to the theatre, and just after dinner I dashed upstairs and knocked at his door suddenly to ask how he was, and waked him out of a sound sleep. Then I was sorry, and wanted to know if there was n't something I

could do for him, and he said he 'd like a drink of water, so I took up the siphon, and the vichy flew all over everything. The room was deluged and so was Jack, and I was so disgusted with myself that I said: 'There! you see what a fool I am; I can't even give a person a glass of water. You ought never to have married me!' And I rushed away downstairs, leaving the door open, and poor Jack had to ring and ring for ages for someone to come and shut it."

"I 'm afraid Jack has his own trials," said Catherine, laughing.

Beatrice turned round in her chair with a sudden movement that made all the tea-things rattle.

"Oh! you don't think I am disagreeable to live with, do you?" she asked, much troubled. "I 'm not nagging or troublesome about little things, am I? I don't want to be small. I know I 've got a bad temper. I always have had, and I do show it, but it does n't last long. I was saying to Jack only the other day that I had not thrown anything at him for ever so long. Is n't it so, Jack?" as her husband entered the room. "I have n't

been in a passion for months and months, have I? And I do amuse you, don't I? I know I am funny even when I am angry. You don't think I'm not nice to live with, Catherine?"

"I think you are charming, even when you are in your worst tempers," returned her friend, and Mr. Seaton added, in his quiet way, —

"You see my life is diversified, Miss Blair. Sometimes sunshiny and sometimes stormy, but never dull."

"I don't think you are very nice to me, Jack," said his wife. "Will you have some tea? You had better not, because you 'll be horrid if you grow fat."

Mr. Seaton, who was perhaps rather broad-shouldered for his height, but in no immediate danger of the awful fate pointed out to him, smiled as if he had heard the remark before, and sighed as if he knew he should often hear it again, and sitting down, began to open some letters that he had found on the table as he passed through the hall.

Everything was quiet except for the faint rustling of the papers.

Beatrice leaned her long, slim, rose-bemuslined figure back in her white wicker chair and looked out at the ocean and the sunset. The sky was all gray and gold and flame, and the gulls were wheeling above the rocks. Every now and then the wind would carry a little breath of salt and seaweed from the beach below to the cliffs above.

Beatrice thought of how restless she was and how peaceful she wanted to be; how her life was made up of little efforts for little ends; of how much she wanted to do things that were worth while, things that were noble, things that would help other people. If only Jack understood! Then she looked at Jack. She wondered why he had married her. She honestly thought her brilliant, black-lashed eyes, peach-tinted skin and charming, irregular features absolutely ugly, and was fond of shaking her fist at her reflection in the glass and calling herself "you hideous young woman!" Neither had she much respect for her mental powers, and as for her character — she varied between thinking herself the most misunderstood and the least worth understanding person of her acquaintance. As for Jack, she was of opinion

that he took this life much too easily. She would have liked him to be seriously interested and ambitious, if not for himself, at least to help in the work of the world. There must be something one could do, thought Beatrice.

Jack thought how comfortable a well-stuffed armchair seemed after a morning on the golf links and an afternoon in the saddle, what a good thing exercise was, and how well a man felt after a day spent in the open air. He was contented, healthy, happy, and pleasantly tired. What more did anyone want? Life was easy, and fitted him like a well-worn glove. Beatrice's restless dissatisfaction was incomprehensible to him, but it was part of Beatrice, and therefore to be borne. He admired her very much, and what he did not understand he criticised as little as possible. In a word, he was a philosopher, except when he was goaded into the position of a patient man. He glanced at his wife and thought how wistful she looked, and then he wondered how she would take the news contained in the letter he had just opened. His aunt, Mrs. Wilhelmina Webster, announced that she meant to come and spend a fortnight with them "[if convenient]" in

brackets. Jack guiltily remembered that he was going off on a cruise with a friend.

Catherine thought of the "little more" it takes to make everybody happy and the "little less" with which most have to manage, and of the person who loved her best and was far enough away at the moment.

The gold and flame faded out of the sky, and the servant came in to take away the tea-things.

Mr. Seaton stretched himself with a mighty stretch, and Catherine wondered what time it was.

"There's a clock at your elbow, but it does n't often go," said Beatrice, coming back from the clouds. "Why do you care what time it is? It's so beautiful! You can't want to go and dress yet."

"Here's a letter I'd like you to read, Beatrice," said her husband, putting the envelope on the table beside her.

"Oh! not now, Jack. I know it's something horrid. The handwriting looks dreadfully familiar. I'm sure it's from some of your family, saying that I 'ought' to be or do something that I *won't* be or do. Don't make me read it, please."

She brushed the letter with her elbow, and it fell to the floor.

Jack picked it up with perfect politeness and put it into his pocket.

"I 'm very sorry, my dear," he said. "I 'm afraid you won't like it, but Aunt Wilhelmina wants to come here on Thursday for a fortnight."

"Like it!" cried Beatrice, with a wail of despair. "I think it 's the very horridest thing that could have happened. Oh, Jack, this is awful! And I thought I should enjoy myself so much while you were away! Well, I shall just write and say that I have a bad case of scarlet fever."

"I 'm afraid she 'd only come the faster for that. She rather fancies herself as a nurse."

"Well, then, think of some other excuse, quickly," cried his wife, stamping with impatience. "I won't have her. Do you think I must have her, Jack? Say you don't. She 's so strait-laced and stiff that it makes me bad just to look at her. Can't we write and tell her not to come? I suppose you 'll say we can't. *You* are well out of it, at any rate. Oh, why do I always have to do things that I

hate?" lamented Beatrice, with tears in her voice.

Jack looked troubled and a little irritated.

"I 'm awfully sorry that you should be imposed on, my dear," he said, "but it is partly your own fault. You asked her yourself when she was in town last winter."

"But she said she was going abroad then," returned his wife, much aggrieved. "I never dreamed she 'd come —" Then, as she saw he was really distressed — "But never mind, Jack, I 'll be good. Poor old lady! There are n't many people to whom I can give pleasure, and I ought to be glad that she wants to come. But Catherine has got to stay on with me. You must, Catherine. Nobody can want you as much as I do. She must, must n't she, Jack? You can't expect me to support Aunt Wilhelmina alone."

The day of that lady 's visitation was marked by a sweeping rain-storm, in the midst of which she arrived — a tall, supercilious old woman in black, who looked down her nose at people. Beatrice had sent the carriage, but when Mrs. Webster found it unattended save by the coachman who drove it and the footman who sought

her out, she dismissed it at once, remarking aloud that she did not accept the "loan" of people's carriages. Either they came for her themselves or she took a cab. And a cab she took, and appeared, with her two modest trunks on the top of it, some fifteen minutes after the return of her niece-in-law's discarded vehicle.

"I 'm so sorry you did not use the carriage," said Beatrice, meeting her at the front door.

"I prefer to be independent, my dear," returned Mrs. Webster, presenting a chilly cheek to be kissed. "For which reason I should be glad if you would permit my cabman to carry up my trunks. He is already paid with that express understanding."

Beatrice gasped and led the way into the drawing-room, where Mrs. Webster followed her. Catherine was introduced, and asked, for want of something better to say, whether the journey had been tiresome. It seemed an unfortunate speech.

"I suppose all journeys are tiresome to unobservant young people," remarked Aunt Wilhelmina. "Where is Jack, my dear Beatrice?"

Beatrice explained that Jack had gone out

to see a man about a polo pony, but that he would certainly be back for luncheon.

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Webster, with a soundless sniff. "In my youthful days young men did not treat the visit of a relative so cavalierly."

"Jack was exceedingly sorry to be obliged to go out this morning," went on Beatrice, rolling horrified eyes in her friend's direction, "and he feels dreadfully that he is going to miss the greater part of your visit, but he promised long ago to go off on the yacht with this friend of his, and he can't very well get out of it. Promises were rather binding even in your time, Aunt Wilhelmina. I remember you told me so when I was first engaged to Jack."

"If you profited by all the advice given you on that occasion you must be an excellent wife by this time, my dear Beatrice," returned her aunt, impenetrably. "I am sorry Jack is to be away during my visit, but perhaps my being with you makes his mind easier."

"Easier about his going?" said Mrs. Seaton. "Well, perhaps in one way it does, Aunt Wilhelmina. But we both go our own

way, you know. Sometimes we hardly see each other for weeks." She watched with delight the gradual stiffening of Mrs. Webster's face. "We never like the same things nor the same places. You know how it is with married people. I dare say you and Mr. Webster felt just the same. Let me show you your room, Aunt Wilhelmina; you look quite tired suddenly."

Catherine, choking with suppressed laughter, followed them upstairs and took refuge in her own room.

After a short absence Mrs. Seaton returned and threw herself into a chair with the air of one who has abandoned hope.

"Well, Jack," she said, addressing her husband, who had just come in, "your aunt is here. And do you know, I think she must have been offended that neither of us went to meet her, for she sent the carriage away and came up in a cab."

"Did she?" returned Mr. Seaton, abstractedly. "That's too bad. Do you know, Beatrice, the storm has blown down half of one of the chimneys on the south side of the house?"

"Oh, never mind; you can put up a new one, and we'll break a bottle of champagne down it and christen it after Aunt Wilhelmina," said Beatrice, whose indifference to things domestic was perfectly unfeigned. "We don't need chimneys until the autumn, and we should n't need them then if I had my way, because we should n't be here late enough. How glad I always am to get back to town! But what I wanted to say, Jack, was that you 'll have to be awfully nice and sweet to your aunt to-night. It won't be very gay for her otherwise, for Catherine dines out and I 've got to leave you directly after dinner. Do you think she will mind?"

"Where are you going? Oh, Thursday! It 's that ridiculous Boys' Club, of course. Can't you give it up to-night?"

"I suppose it does seem ridiculous to you, and I know I 'm not much good at such things. Catherine, who 's only been once, has ever so much more influence than I have. But I 've begun it now, and I hate to stop; and one evening a week is n't much to give up to it. It 's ever so much more amusing than going out to dinner and sitting between two

horrid old men who talk to you about food and women's dress. Dear Jack," patting him on the shoulder, "do be nice about it, and make it all right with your aunt. You can think it just as ridiculous as you please. I often think things you do ridiculous! I *must* go to-night, because I promised to stop for Mrs. Vandermark. She's going to take her banjo and play for them. And Grifforth Chandos is going to talk to them. I 'm sorry it 's your last night at home, but you and Aunt Wilhelmina can have a nice, cosy gossip after dinner," concluded Beatrice, sparkling all over with sudden mischief. "I 'll leave my special brand of cigarettes out for her."

Fortunately a boys' club presented itself in a perfectly seemly and becoming way to Mrs. Webster's mental eyes. She regretted her niece's absence, but approved the occasion of it. Anything one could do to improve the condition of the poor should be done.

"But we're only trying to amuse them a little," cried Mrs. Seaton, over her shoulder, as she stepped into the carriage. "Good-night; don't keep your aunt up too late, Jack."

But apparently both Mrs. Webster and her nephew had been of one mind in regard to the advisability of an early separation, for when Miss Blair returned from her dinner-party at the comparatively early hour of half-past ten, the drawing-room was entirely deserted, and it was not until some time after she had gone up-stairs that she heard the voices of her host and hostess, who appeared to have returned to the house together.

Beatrice came into her room next morning almost as soon as the breakfast tray, in a long pink dressing-gown and with very large, sleepy eyes.

"Well, my dear," she said, "Jack's gone. He just knocked at the door and said good-bye to me. It was the seventh knock this morning. Aunt Wilhelmina sent long before eight to know at what time I would breakfast. So I wrote her a little note and said I'd had mine long ago, but I hoped she'd be as lazy as she pleased. Won't she be furious! Jack's rather furious with me, too. You see, she went to bed early last night, and he thought he'd come down to the Boys' Club for me, and I didn't know it; so when they told me

the carriage was there, I said it could wait. I was having such an interesting time! Grifforth Chandos had brought a friend with him, a man from the West, — one of the big, broad-shouldered, direct-looking young men that Gibson draws, — and he was talking to us about the characteristic differences between Western boys and Eastern boys and what training was best for each; not to me, particularly, — he was n't introduced to me, — but I was listening. It was very interesting."

"And all the time, I suppose, Jack was waiting."

"Yes. Was n't it dreadful? But it was n't my fault, was it? And it really was funny, Catherine, only he was n't able to see that side of it last night. After about half an hour he sent in to say that Mr. Seaton was in the carriage. I thought, you know, that it had picked him up somewhere, — at least, I don't know what I thought, I was so busy listening, — so I just said, 'Well, let it take Mr. Seaton home and come back for me.' So you see by the time I did come Jack was n't pleased, naturally, and I cried all the way home because I said he was so cross to me."

"What had he said?" inquired Catherine, sympathetically.

"Nothing at all," said Beatrice; "that was just the trouble."

Catherine laughed, and Beatrice smiled a little.

"Poor Jack, he is good to me," she said. "I told him this morning I'd forgive him if he'd say he was sorry. So he said he was, and then I said I was, and would be good while he was away. Get up, Catherine, and let us take Aunt Wilhelmina to the beach to see all the smart bathing dresses. I'm sure they did n't wear such costumes in her youthful days."

Mrs. Webster was in the drawing-room reading the morning paper, her back very stiff, her head very erect, and her eye-glasses so far down her nose that they appeared to clip her very nostrils. Beatrice was very sweet with her, apologised for the lateness of her own appearance, and hoped everything had been done for her aunt's comfort. Full particulars of Jack's departure were given, and a short dissertation upon the duty of wives listened to with a demureness beautiful to see.

"Did you ever know anybody as good as I am?" she whispered to Catherine, as Mrs. Webster, having agreed to go out with them, swept from the room to put on her bonnet and mantle. "Poor old lady, if I can't enjoy her visit, it seems hard that she should not. I hope she does, but I shall be glad when it's over."

As they drove along, Aunt Wilhelmina had a great deal to say about the vulgarity and ostentation of modern times. The houses were too big, the women too expensively dressed, the automobiles went too fast. Elegance, simplicity, refinement, and that being known as a "great lady" were so entirely the products of her own generation that it was doubtful if Beatrice could even form an idea of what society must have been in the days when they flourished.

Beatrice mildly submitted that she didn't find society very interesting at present.

"Catherine says I'm getting morbid about it," she said; "and perhaps I am. I suppose I'd like it well enough if I were awfully admired or if there were some particular person whom I cared to meet!"

"My dear Beatrice!" exclaimed Mrs. Webster, as the carriage drew up, "a young married woman —"

"Oh, I know, Aunt Wilhelmina, it's very wicked to talk like that, and I ought n't ever to want to speak to anyone but Jack, as you never wanted to speak to anyone but Mr. Webster. I'm sure you never had a taste that your husband could n't share, nor wanted to know about anything that he could n't tell you. I'm afraid I'm not like that, and I'm so naughty that I don't care."

With which revolutionary sentiment she guided Mrs. Webster's reluctant feet down the steps to the green-roofed pavilion, from which many gaily dressed people were watching the bathers.

The day was warm, and the beach was crowded. Groups of girls in flower-tinted dresses sat under the tents. Long lines of bathing-dressed boys browned in the sun. Shouts and little screams and gusts of laughter came from the ever-changing figures in the surf and on the rafts. Bathing-house doors banged as the people went in and out, and from the men's side of the building could be heard the

blows of some athletically inclined youth as he "punched the bag."

Catherine, who was going to bathe, went off to her house to dress, while Beatrice found a chair for her aunt and established her in the shadiest corner of the pavilion.

Mrs. Webster gazed straight before her in perfect silence for a few minutes; then she said, with great distinctness, —

"Are all these people respectable, my dear?"

Her niece was saved the responsibility of a reply by the fact that Grifforth Chandos greeted her at the same moment.

"You don't often come here of a morning, Beatrice," he said. He had known her from childhood and always used her Christian name. "What brings you to-day? Here's Hamlin feasting his anarchistic eyes on the wretched proportions of the youthful millionaire. By the way, I didn't introduce him to you last night."

He put his hand on his friend's shoulder and turned him round by way of introduction.

Beatrice found herself looking up into the brilliant brown eyes of the young man she had seen at the Boys' Club the preceding night.

Had ever young man before such an intent expression, such a straight nose and such a thick crop of yellow hair, she wondered?

"Why does he call you anarchistic?" she asked, smiling.

"Because I happened to say, the other day, that these boys here —" and he waved his hand toward a group of brown figures in brilliantly striped jerseys — "would never make good citizens, they'd been born into too much luxury, and that I should like to abolish all inheritance and make each one of them work his own way up. I'd give him only a fair start."

"And what about the girls?" asked Beatrice, much interested.

Had ever any woman in the world such sweet eyes or such a charming face, Hamlin wondered.

"Oh, I dare say it would be good for them, too," he answered. "But I'm not dealing out justice this morning. I'm just the mildest, most peaceable, law-abiding person under the sun, and by to-morrow I dare say I may be wishing that I had been born in a palace myself. Isn't it good to be alive on a day like this?

Only I 'd rather be talking to you under the trees somewhere than on this burning beach."

"You might be cooler in the water, perhaps," suggested Beatrice. She really wanted to talk to him, but had a nervous desire to make it easy for him to leave her if he pleased.

"Don't despise me utterly," he said. "I hate surf-bathing. It 's a humiliating confession, but I do not swim well. I was brought up in the most inland of inland places, and I never did anything, in fact, but read all day long."

Beatrice nodded sympathetically. Here was a young man whose mind was evidently more to him than his muscles.

"If you are not going to bathe," he added, "may I stay here and talk to you?"

She made a little gesture toward an empty chair near by.

"Do," she said. "My aunt and I are here only to look on, and shall be very glad to be talked to. Aunt Wilhelmina, Mr. Hamlin."

Mrs. Webster, withdrawing her fascinated eyes for one moment from the tossing figures in the surf, gave Mr. Hamlin a stiff bow.

Grifforth Chandos sauntered away, murmuring something about a dip before luncheon.

Beatrice looked at the dazzling blue water and wondered what she should say next; then she looked at the young man, and was somewhat embarrassed by the directness of his gaze.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I have a bad habit of staring at people when I am wondering about them, and I've been wondering about you ever since last night."

"There is nothing very extraordinary about me," she returned a little uneasily, for the directness of his speech matched the directness of his look, and she did not know quite how to deal with it. "I'm a very commonplace sort of person."

"Are you?" said Hamlin. "You don't look it. You look as if you were half the time the saddest, and half the time the merriest, person in the world. I beg your pardon again — you don't like that. You think I ought n't to speak to you about yourself when I've only just met you. Please forgive me. I would n't offend you for anything. But somehow, when I was watching you last night, you looked so out of place among all those

little rascals, and yet so pathetically anxious to do your duty by them, I could not help speculating about you, and I speculated so much that I felt as if I knew you quite well this morning. One reason I talked so long about — what was it I talked about so long? — was, that for some unaccountable reason you seemed interested, and I wondered why."

"Because I thought you were in earnest," said Beatrice, "and I like to listen and to talk to people who are in earnest about something. I like, sometimes, to be interested in things that are different from all this." She glanced over her shoulder at the pavilion, where groups met and dissolved, and people stood or sat, or lounged against the railing, talking and laughing.

Detached sentences floated to their ears. "My machine's a beauty." "He certainly fouled the *Ghost* at the start." "Did you ever see such hair? It's yellower than the sun." "Her figure's not half-bad, but her conversation, my dear!"

Beatrice looked at Hamlin and smiled.

"You did n't talk like that," she said.

"Oh, I 've just got the habit of making speeches about theories," he said. "You

must n't think I 'm serious except in spots. But there 's quite enough to be earnest about, of course, only, don't let 's be earnest to-day, shall we? But yes, of course we shall, if you like."

Beatrice disclaimed any grave conversational intentions. She had meant only that at times one got tired of gossip and chatter, — not that she was capable of anything much better, she did n't mean that, only she knew how much better things there were to be capable of, — and presently she found herself unfolding certain cherished theories she had in her mind for helping people. To help people, to be of use to somebody; that particular want in Beatrice's nature kept peeping out through all the emphatic likes and dislikes expressed in her sentences. And her schemes were always for the worst boys, the most wretched women, the most unprofitable servants; whereas Hamlin's unpitying philosophy contemned all incompetence to the devil, and only cleared the way of chance to those whose footsteps sounded success. The big clock over the bathing-house pointed to the hour of one before she rose to go home. The young man

followed her slowly as she and her aunt walked up the path, constantly stopping to exchange a word with this or that acquaintance.

"Who is that young woman coming out? and, indeed, she ought never to have gone into the water," said Mrs. Webster, indicating an over-developed figure in a purple tunic (such as one sees in the pictures of French bathing beaches), long, full trousers coming halfway down the leg, and white sandals, with crossed fastenings over the instep. The flaming red hair of the lady in question would have attracted the attention of a blind man.

"That's Mrs. Merrythought," answered Beatrice, with a little shudder of disgust. "She's a horrid woman. She ran away from her husband, who was a bishop, and married an actor, a mere boy. She——"

"A divorced woman!" cried Mrs. Webster. "My dear, let us go on quickly. In my day such things were not tolerated. Such people were not seen or known. It is unpleasant to me to be in the same place with her."

"I don't think her being divorced is dreadful," said Beatrice. "I don't see why two people who don't get on together should have

to stay together all their lives. But she 's just horrid herself, Aunt Wilhelmina."

"It was all in the papers, I remember," said Mrs. Webster. "I wondered at the time how I should act if I were ever brought face to face with such a creature. I wish I had not left my lorgnettes at home, my dear. Do you think I might borrow a pair from anybody? I should really like to see what that person looks like."

But unfortunately the flaming-haired lady disappeared into her bathing-house, and Mrs. Webster's curiosity remained unsatisfied.

Catherine joined them at this moment, and Beatrice, falling behind a little in the narrow path, found herself addressed by Hamlin.

"May I come to see you, please?" he said, in his direct way. "I don't know whether I ought to ask, or whether I ought to wait till you signify that such is your pleasure. But it 's perfectly safe for me to say I should be awfully glad if it were your pleasure — and I suppose I ought to add, your aunt's — soon."

"We are always at home late in the afternoon," she answered conventionally, "and I

shall be very glad if you will come," she added more cordially.

"To-morrow, then," he said, helping her into the carriage, and thinking he had never seen such a multiplicity of lace frills or such dear little pointed shoes in all his life before.

"To-morrow afternoon? I'm afraid we promised to go to polo, but the day after — that's Sunday — if you like."

"The day after," he echoed, stepping back as the carriage started, "I shall certainly come."

Mrs. Seaton was rather silent on the drive home.

She was more difficult to suit than usual about her hats when she came to dress for polo the next day. One was on the bed, one — rather battered — on the floor, and she was just removing another from her head when Catherine came on the scene.

"There you are, all ready and exactly on time, dear little Catherine," she said. "Did you ever see such a fright as I am?" — making a hideous grimace at herself. "I should think Marie would be discouraged, for no matter how much pains she takes, I always

look just the same, only sometimes worse. I'm so sorry I tore the lace bow on that toque! Poor Marie!" stroking her maid's cheek with the tip of a slender forefinger, "don't mend it to-day. It does n't matter when it's mended. I'll mend it. I like your hat, Catherine."

"You always like other people's things better than your own, dear," said Catherine, laughing. "Any one of yours is prettier than mine, really."

"Do you think so? Oh, I wish you'd take one, or all of them," cried Beatrice, turning round from the glass. "If you knew how much pleasure it would give me to see you in them!" And indeed she would gladly have given away anything she had to anybody who wanted it, and never have thought a second time about it, in her generous heart.

"If Madame would try the hat with the rose wreath once more," pleaded the maid.

And Madame, remarking that it did not make any difference what a person like herself had on if she were only neat and fresh, crowned herself with the rose-wreathed hat and departed.

It seemed to meet with the approval of one long-limbed, lean, broad-shouldered young giant named Hamlin, for he hardly took his eyes off its wearer all the afternoon.

Beatrice was beginning to find that there was some pleasure in going out "when there was somebody you cared to meet" or who appeared to care about meeting you.

She and Catherine had been sitting in the victoria watching the polo; at least, Catherine had been watching, and Beatrice had been conscious that mallets were clashing, men were shouting, and ponies' quick little feet thudding in her immediate vicinity. Sometimes a bell clanged, and always the breeze blew and the sun shone. There was a feeling of excitement and holiday-making in the air, and a gay sound of light voices and laughter.

Hamlin had been standing talking to her, with his foot on the step of the carriage. They had not plunged very deeply into the affairs of the universe that day. They had been discussing things of a more personal nature. He had been half-regretting the unsporting character of his education, — that was, if she thought all men ought to do that sort

of thing well, — but even at college he had been an incorrigible reader ; he had n't cared for rowing or football, though they used to come and badger him about it every year. He had not ever made friends very easily, and he supposed that was a bad sign.

Beatrice hoped it was n't, for she had not made many friends among girls of her own age when she was young. Hamlin smiled at the expression. She had had rather a sad childhood, and her grandmother, who had brought her up from her early orphaned days, had not thought the companionship of other children necessary for her happiness. So she had been a lonely child, and, she was afraid, rather a bad child, — at least, her governess had said so, — and everybody had always told her how ugly and unattractive she was, so that when she first grew up she was astonished that people liked her. Then she stopped suddenly, blushing and confused, surprised to find how much she had said, and fearing that he would think it necessary to contradict her.

But he did not. It never occurred to him that this slender, sweet-voiced, brilliant-eyed, gracious lady could have suffered under such

astonishment long. But he felt that her little-girlhood, from which, in spite of her gentle, assured manner, she hardly seemed to him to have emerged, must have been pathetic in its way.

"And you had nobody but your grandmother and the governess?" he said.

"Nobody," she answered; "and then my grandmother died, and I went abroad with my governess, and travelled."

"And now you've come home and are living with your aunt, are n't you?" he went on as she paused. "That was your aunt who was with you the other day, was n't it?"

She looked up in surprise. Was it possible he did n't know she was married? Before she could speak, a group of laughing people — a rosy, yellow-haired girl and three or four men — stopped close to the carriage. The girl's ridiculous little shoe had come unlaced, and there was a humorous controversy going on among the men as to who should tie it. She put her foot on the wheel of the victoria, smiling at Beatrice, whom she knew.

"You are tying it with a true-lovers' knot, Bertie," she said to the successful candidate,

"and I 'm a married lady, so it is n't proper. I shall tell my husband."

Hamlin also smiled at Beatrice.

"I 'm glad you are not a married lady," he said. "The idea of that child's having a husband! There ought to be a course of 'married life' in the last term of every boarding-school year, to teach women what a serious thing it is they go into so lightly."

So he did not know! Beatrice wondered how it could possibly have happened, and what to say. It was so awkward to blurt out, "I am married!" and it was rather fun, in a way, his not knowing. But then it was a thing he must soon find out. Someone might address her by her married name within the next few minutes. It would be foolish not to tell him. Catherine and Grifforth Chandos, who had just appeared, were clamouring to be taken to the big red-and-yellow striped tent for tea, and Beatrice, as she followed her friend's dragging lilac flounces over the grass, resolved to make her announcement at once. But Hamlin was a few paces behind, having stopped to pick up a little wisp of a handkerchief and an enormous pink parasol which she had dropped

in getting out of the carriage, and before he could join her, a middle-sized, elderly lady, with layers of rustling silk flounces and a hat full of peacock feathers, had borne down upon them.

"My dear," said this lady, who was known as Mrs. General Sentinel, "you are the very person I want to see. I've just taken a cook on trial, who says he used to live with your grandmother. I remember his dinners were excellent, but what I wanted to ask was — is the man extravagant? You really have no idea how extravagant people's cooks are in this place. Mrs. Condor's bill at the butcher's last month was something enormous. I won't mention the figures, but I happened to be at the telephone when she was remonstrating with Mr. Jointz, and I was surprised myself. He swore she had had every single item on it, and indeed, he said the same thing to me the next day when I spoke to him about it. Do you find Jointz very expensive, as butchers go?"

"I don't fret very much about the bills, Mrs. Sentinel," returned Beatrice, demurely. "I suppose it would be better if I did, but I hate so to think about food. I'd have chops

and mashed potatoes every day if I could. 'Toinette is very good and economical, and I leave it all to her. I don't remember about the cook you 've taken. Don't you hate people who 'live well' and have 'well-trained servants'?"

"I 'm afraid I don't agree with you," said Mrs. Sentinel, with rather a sniff, which the natural uplifting of her sharp little, middle-aged nose greatly emphasised. "I like to be well served, and I prefer good food to bad. I even prefer to go to houses that are well run. I like to see how people live."

Beatrice's thick black lashes lifted just enough to send a mischievous glance at Catherine.

"I 'm afraid my house is n't well run," she said. "I don't take half enough interest. I like pictures, and books, and beautiful things to put into it, but as long as the servants are contented, and no one particularly objects to anything, I don't much care how I live."

"Then you can't tell me about the cook, evidently. Well, I 'll try him. By the way, perhaps you would do me a favour and come and fill a place for me at dinner to-night?"

"To-night — what are we doing to-night,

Catherine?" demanded Beatrice, affrighted, grasping her friend's arm.

"Is n't it the McMasters' moonlight picnic?" returned Catherine, promptly.

"Not to-night," said Mrs. Sentinel. "I know, for my maid has a brother who is their footman, and he always tells her when they entertain. Besides, the McMasters are coming to me to-night. They say he has given her some superb new emeralds, and I want to see them. I was in hopes she 'd wear them at the ball, but I suppose she could n't, with that yellow dress. Did you happen to notice whether there was embroidery or appliqué on that gown? Really, I could not tell without touching it. Well, good-bye. I shall hope to see you to-night. Mr. Chandos is coming. And he has promised to bring you, you know, Mr. Hamlin," nodding to the latter. "Eight o'clock, my dear," to Beatrice; "don't forget."

"I 'm awfully sorry —" began Mrs. Seaton. Catherine gave her a mischievously good-natured little pinch.

"Go," she said, "and amuse yourself for once. I 'll take excellent care of Mrs. Webster. She 'll go, with pleasure, Mrs. Sentinel."

Beatrice looked somewhat bewildered, but in her heart she began to think that "it would be easier to tell him at the dinner."

She was a little troublesome about dressing again that evening, and discarded a flowered silk and a peach-pink brocade for a yellow lace frock, in which she looked like a very distinguished, tall little girl. She was n't going to put on long trains and heavy jewelry only fit for Winter. She hated "ball dresses" for small dinners in Summer. It was very bad taste. It was very vulgar. She hoped Catherine would n't think her too selfish for going out and leaving her alone with Aunt Wilhelmina. She had n't known just what to say. She was always getting into scrapes because she could n't say "No."

Catherine laughed at her.

"You were going to say 'No.' I accepted for you. Go out and have your vanity flattered a little. It will do you good. What you want is a tonic for your self-esteem."

It was a foggy night, and the lamps in the roads and the lights of the automobiles cast great fan-shaped shadows through the gray mist.

The whole world seemed to be shut into a long alley-way full of rolling wheels and ringing bells. Beatrice thought she should never turn into the gate of the Sentinels' place. She was late, as usual. That was because Marie would put a rose in her hair at the last minute. It felt very wobbly.

Mr. Hamlin was to take her in to dinner. As soon as she looked at him she saw that he knew.

"I 'm to have the pleasure of taking you in, Mrs. Seaton," he said ceremoniously, and they walked the length of the room in perfect silence.

"Why did n't you tell me?" he asked, as they took their places.

"I never imagined you did n't know until this afternoon," she said, "and I was interrupted just as I was going to tell you. How was it you did n't, I wonder? You were staying with people who knew me very well. Not that it makes much difference, does it? Only it 's rather funny."

"Yes," he answered, without smiling; "it is rather funny."

"Perhaps you don't like to talk to old married ladies," she went on, laughing. "Are you as young as that?"

"No, I 'm not as young as that, I 'm afraid," he returned, smiling a little this time. "It 's only — don't you see? — that ever since I met you I 've been thinking about you; and ever since I 've been thinking about you, I have thought of you as unmarried. It 's a bit of a shock. I suppose I might have known."

"It is rather odd that you did n't hear anybody speak of me or to me by my married name."

"The Chandoses call you Beatrice," he said, "when they speak of you, and I would not ask them any questions. I don't know why. At least, I do know, but it would not interest you. And it so happens that no one has called you Mrs. Seaton before me until to-night, when Mrs. Sentinel told me I was to take 'Mrs. Seaton' in to dinner, and then spoke of my having been with you this afternoon. Then I knew."

"And you did n't like my not having told you?"

"I did n't mind your not having told me. I just hated the fact."

Beatrice gazed at him for a moment with her great eyes open to their fullest extent.

He pulled himself together. If he showed her what he was feeling she might be offended. She might even think it necessary to forbid him to come to see her. At least, she might change in some way her attitude toward him, and he could not bear that.

"I disapprove of marriage in theory," he said gravely. "I think it's an interference with people's freedom, and everybody should be free."

A theory! Beatrice was relieved of all embarrassment. There was nothing wrong in discussing any sort of a theory, and the difficulties of married life were so thoroughly discussed that by the time dessert appeared they had come to the most revolutionary conclusions. Beatrice was interested and amused, and Hamlin more in love than ever. He rather imagined that her husband did not understand her. What mere husband could?

It was a delightful dinner, Beatrice told Catherine, who came in to see her on her return. Mr. Hamlin had taken her in; he had also talked to her after dinner, and he was coming to see her the next afternoon. He was the most interesting person she had met

for a long time, and really a nice boy. He had such sensible views. It was so pleasant to discuss things with him!

"And I really think he likes me, Catherine. I don't mean *much*, you know. I dare say it was just because he wanted to talk, and I was the nearest woman. But still, I think he likes me."

It certainly appeared so the next day, when he arrived at four o'clock and stayed until half-past six.

Mrs. Webster's sense of propriety was outraged. In her day, she said, young men did not pay visits of such length to young married women. Neither did she approve of being "at home" on Sunday. Sunday was a day of meditation.

Mrs. Seaton disclaimed any desire to interfere with her aunt's meditations, and begged that she would not permit her usual habits to be broken into by any modern custom of which she disapproved. Tea could be sent to her room on Sunday if she preferred it.

Further controversy was diverted by the arrival of a telegram which recalled Catherine to town on the following day.

Beatrice was in despair. What should she do without her? She knew she should be naughty. Aunt Wilhelmina was so trying, and she was sure they would not be on speaking terms by the time Jack came home.

"I want to tell her how 'narrow' she is every time I see her, and I know it will come out sooner or later. And so stiff in her backbone! Just as if she had a poker down the middle seam of her dress," and she walked up and down the room in exact imitation of Mrs. Webster, who had just gone upstairs. "I often tell Jack that if I had known about her I should not have married him. Poor Jack! I hope he's enjoying himself. He's written to me only once, to say he hoped the chimney was up all right and that I was n't having a bad time, and I have n't answered yet, just so that I could tell Aunt Wilhelmina I had not written at all to him, if she asked me. She's always prying into my relations with Jack. I wish Mr. Webster were alive, so that I could retaliate. Oh, Catherine, don't go and leave me! I don't know what I shall do without you!"

But Miss Blair was obliged to go, and Mrs.

Seaton, with many lamentations, saw her off by the afternoon train the next day.

Matters did not improve after her departure. Hamlin dined at the house that very evening, his own hosts being all engaged elsewhere, and Grifforth Chandos having laughingly informed Mrs. Seaton of the fact.

Aunt Wilhelmina was in her most lofty humour, and made herself so superciliously exasperating that she drove Beatrice to do what she had protested against doing all Summer, — going to an enormous ball which was in progress that night at one of the largest and most beautiful houses in the neighbourhood. Hamlin, whom she took down in the carriage with her, on purpose to defy Mrs. Webster's stony glare of opposition, thought he had never seen her look so charming.

Her cheeks were scarlet, and her eyes, under their thick lashes, as brilliant as polished jewels. There were many women at the ball prettier, handsomer, more beautiful than she, but none, he was quite sure, with the same air of delicate distinction. His tall, slender, rose-pink-petalled lady! He wondered that every eye in the room did not follow where she

moved. His eyes did, and so did he, whenever he could. He did not dance, but stood against the wall watching her. He took her to supper, and they sat at a little table near the white stone balcony of the piazza, with palms rustling above their heads and the sea sounding out of the darkness at their feet, until long after the dancing had begun again. She seemed more interested and more gracious even than usual, as if she wanted to make up to him for the constraint and discomfort of the earlier part of the evening. But Hamlin had not minded, had hardly noticed, Mrs. Webster's attitude. He was beginning not to mind anything so long as he could look at, talk to, and be with Beatrice. And surely it could make no difference to her if he never let her know what was in his heart.

He felt, though, that he had put as much restraint upon that organ as it was capable of enduring for one evening, and therefore obliged himself to refuse when, in her sweet, natural way, she offered to drive him as far on his homeward road as she was going, and he did not stand looking after her for more than five minutes after she had gone.

But the two following days found him ringing her front door bell at the earliest afternoon hour permitted by etiquette, and on both occasions they sat on the enclosed piazza and talked until the sun went down and a little crescent moon floated on a wisp of cloud over the water. Of people and nations and languages they talked, and why the new times should be better than the old; and twice Mrs. Webster, returning very late from a long drive with a friend, heard Hamlin's voice as she crossed the hall, and entered the room just in time to see him kiss Beatrice's hand as he said good-bye.

"My dear," she said, on the second occasion, "what is that young man's occupation?"

"I really don't know," answered her niece, dreamily. "Why?"

"Because, in my opinion, the sooner he resumes his vocation, the better. He comes here too often."

"I don't agree with you," said Beatrice.

"You saw him on Friday at the beach," continued her aunt. "You saw him on Saturday afternoon at polo. Mrs. Sentinel tells me that he never left your side the night you

dined with her. He spent all Sunday afternoon here. He dined here on Monday and went to the ball with you; he came yesterday; he was here again to-day ——"

"And he may also be here to-morrow," cried Beatrice, highly incensed. "Do not let us discuss it, Aunt Wilhelmina. I am not a child, you know, and in the matter of whom I see, I must judge for myself entirely, if you please."

"Your conduct will give rise to gossip," said Mrs. Webster, "and that no young married woman can afford."

"Gossip!" interrupted Beatrice. "Why should there be gossip? What is there to gossip about? It's rather hard if I may not have a friend without all this fuss."

"Such friendships are dangerous."

"Perhaps they were in your time, Aunt Wilhelmina, but really, we are not so much on the lookout for evil now. I don't see why you should assume that I am horrid just because I'm neither a prude nor a saint. But whatever you assume, I am not going to give up seeing Mr. Hamlin. He's the only person I have had any pleasure in talking to for ever

so long. Nobody else seems to be interested in the things that interest me. I shall see him as often as possible for the rest of my life."

Dinner was not a particularly agreeable meal that evening. Mrs. Webster looked down her nose and never spoke except in answer to a direct question. Mrs. Seaton was still exasperated and would not conciliate her. Never was bedtime more welcome to the two ladies.

Hamlin and Beatrice went bicycling the next afternoon, and Mrs. Webster watched them from the window with an inscrutable, stony look.

"I wonder whether I shall ever have such a pleasant week again," said the young man, as they dismounted at the door on their return.

"Of course you will," said Mrs. Seaton, gaily. "Your holiday is n't over yet, and then, you know, some day we are to go abroad together, — you said you 'd come the next time Jack and I went, — and we 'll go back to Italy, and I 'll show you some of the beautiful things you did n't see before."

"And I 'll show you a priest-driven, soldier-ridden, overtaxed people, who plod through their lives like beasts of burden. It made my

blood boil to travel through Italy, — just to see the look in the people's faces."

"And I'm so selfish," cried Beatrice; "I never saw anything of all that. I was only looking for the beautiful things."

"As you always will, my sweet lady," he answered. "I beg your pardon. No, I think I'd better not go abroad with you. I must stay at home and work, you know. Some day, perhaps, I shall amount to something. I should like you to be proud of having known me but I don't suppose anything so marvellous as that could ever happen. It's ridiculous."

"It is not ridiculous at all. Why should n't you make something worth while of your life? Only you're not going to set about it just to-day, are you?"

He gave a curious little laugh.

"I don't know that," he said. "One can't tell what is coming to meet one from behind the next corner. Ah, well, whatever it is, good-bye for to-day. You can't know how I have liked being with you. Liked! What an absurd word! 'Liked being with you.' But I'm afraid to express it in any other way for fear of offending you. Good-bye."

Beatrice walked slowly up the steps, through the hall and out on to the enclosed piazza. She dropped her little white gloves and her veil as she passed, and the butler picked them up and put them on the table as usual.

"Tea, please, Thompson," she said, "here on the piazza; and ask Mrs. Webster if she feels like coming down."

But Mrs. Webster was already there, seated in the straightest-backed chair the place afforded. She exchanged commonplaces with her niece while the tea-table was being brought and the tray set upon it, but after the servant had gone she put down her cup and saucer, cleared her throat once a little nervously, and said, —

"I think you may expect Jack home this evening, Beatrice. I telegraphed to him yesterday."

Beatrice's hand shook so with sudden passion that she had to put her own cup down to prevent its falling on the floor.

"You telegraphed to him!" she cried. "And for what reason? But I need not ask. You think unwarrantable things, Aunt Wilhelmina, and you take unwarrantable liberties.

You must have a horrid mind. How did you dare do such a thing?"

She rose from the table as she spoke and approached Mrs. Webster. She shivered so with anger that she could hardly stand. She felt absolutely sick with rage and disgust.

"I have nothing to say to you," she went on, "except that you will have to explain to Jack yourself why you sent for him, and what you think of his wife. Whatever comes of this, you will be responsible. I shall go to town to-night."

She rang the bell.

"Telephone to the stable that I shall want the carriage at eight o'clock to take me out," she said to the footman, "and tell Thompson that Mrs. Webster is dining alone. I shall not dine at home."

Upstairs in her room she walked up and down in blind fury, pushing the chairs out of her way to make a clear space for her passionate steps. All her feelings were outraged, — her pride, her dignity, her self-esteem. Seen through this horrible old woman's eyes, the idyl of the last few days became the plot of any vulgar modern novel.

And Jack had been sent for! Jack, who would n't understand it, or her, or anything but that he ought, in future, always to stay at home and look after her! Probably Aunt Wilhelmina would make him see that he ought never to leave her alone again. Never in all her life! She must be watched. She felt already like a rat in a trap. It was intolerable. She could not rest till she was safely started. She would go to her house in town and make what terms she pleased from there. Did Aunt Wilhelmina really think she was going to stay here, like a child, to be scolded and punished?

The housemaid came to light the lamps, and Mrs. Seaton smoothed her hair and managed to compose her quivering face. As calmly as she could she changed her dress and tried to think what things should be put into her bag. Very little was necessary, for she always left half her wardrobe in town. It would have been a comfort to her in many ways to have had her maid with her, but Marie had been given permission to go to a ball that night, and Beatrice was always considerate about her servants.

She tried to eat the sandwich and drink the

sherry that the housemaid had brought her, and then, finding that every mouthful choked her, hurried downstairs. Mrs. Webster, with a set, white face, was waiting for her in the hall, but Beatrice dashed past her and flung herself into the carriage.

It was Thursday night, and the footman asked if they should drive to the Boys' Club, and seemed surprised when she said, "To the boat." It was late. Suppose they should miss it. She could n't get away that night. She put her head out of the window and asked if they could n't drive a little faster. But when they reached the dock it appeared that there had been some delay. She had a quarter of an hour to wait.

As she turned away from the ticket office she came face to face with Hamlin. His face flushed as their eyes met, and hers turned pale.

"You here!" she stammered. "Why, where are you going? I mean — I beg your pardon — I was surprised to see you. I should not have asked like that."

"You shall always ask me what you please, my lady," he said, "and I 'll tell you. I 'll

make a clean breast of it. I meant to do it this afternoon. I 'm running away."

He half smiled as he spoke, but his eyes looked very stern.

"Running away!" echoed Beatrice, still confused by the sudden meeting. "So am I. Something has happened that makes it impossible for me to stay. I 'm going to town."

"To-night? By this boat?"

"Yes, to-night, by this boat."

Hamlin shrugged his shoulders. "It 's on the knees of the gods," he said. "I did my best." Then he turned to her with a great delight in his eyes. "Sweet of my heart, did n't you know I was running away from you? Did n't you guess that I could not stay without telling you I loved you, as I tell you now? Only I can never tell you how much. Not in all my whole life. You don't know what you are to me; you don't know what ambition you put into me. Don't look like that! Surely you guessed."

She moved away from him and went and sat down in a corner of the small waiting-room. He followed. There were very few people about, and except for the footman standing

near the door with her dressing-bag, nobody to whom she was known.

"Are you angry? You can't be angry. Oh, if you could only know how I feel! Nobody could be more afraid to offend you. Nobody could love you better, nobody — it sounds conceited, but I think it 's true — could understand you better. You say something has happened at home that makes it impossible for you to go back. Don't go back. Don't ever go back. I beg your pardon; I 'm mad to speak like that. But I 've kept it to myself for so long, and I love you, I love you, I love you."

Beatrice's head swam. The lights were blurred for a minute and Hamlin's voice sounded from a great way off. She could n't think. She was confused. She had been through such a storm of anger, and now this other storm was sweeping her off her feet. One thing only seemed certain. She could not go home; she must go on to town that night and think it out there.

"You said the future was on the knees of the gods," she said. "I can't think. I don't know what to say to you. It suddenly seems to me that perhaps I was running away from

you, too. I thought I was angry with — with somebody else." She got up and walked slowly across the floor.

"You are not going back?" said Hamlin, hoarsely.

She looked up at him with vague eyes. "No," she said, "I 'm going to town to-night as I intended."

She took her dressing-bag from the footman, got out a pencil, and wrote on a piece of paper:

"I am going to town to-night. Mr. Hamlin is going up in the same boat. I do not know whether I shall come back to you or not. — Beatrice."

This she folded and sealed with a foreign stamp she found in her purse. Then she directed it to her husband, and gave it to the man as she dismissed him. She felt like a woman in a dream as she walked over the gangplank on to the boat with Hamlin, and she looked so white that he was frightened.

He thought she was faint, and hurried her to a chair, saying, —

"You look so pale, sweetheart. You must let me get you something. I 've a flask somewhere in one of my bags. You will be really

ill. Stay here one moment and I'll get it for you."

As he left her, it dimly came back to her mind that this had happened before. When she started on her wedding trip with Jack she had been awfully tired, and he had dashed off to get her his man's infallible remedy in just the same impulsive way. It seemed so domestic. A woman may have a friend, or even a lover — but she cannot be domestic with two men. Consciousness of her position and a sudden courage returned to her. What was she doing? — she who had resented so fiercely Aunt Wilhelmina's insulting thought? She was a horrid woman, then. She must be, or Hamlin would never have said what he had to her. But he did mean it; surely he really loved her? Then she was ruining his life at the very beginning, and Jack's at the middle, and her own altogether. She must be a wicked woman, a horrible woman, as bad as Mrs. Merrythought. She saw Hamlin coming back, threading his way among the passengers to the dark corner where he had left her seated, and a sudden revulsion of feeling made her almost hate him. She started to her feet.

"I must go," she said; "I must get off the boat. Don't — please don't try to stop me. Don't argue with me. I will write to you. I have been a fool. I've been selfish and only thought of my own amusement and pleasure and interest. I will not spoil anybody's life — not my husband's, nor yours, nor my own. Yes, yes, I believe you love me, but if you understand me, let me go."

He stood still and looked down at her for an instant.

"Go, then," he said. "I would not have you do anything that you do not wish to do. But go very quickly, my sweet little lady, for God knows it's hard to let you."

He turned away, and she sprang across the gangplank and disappeared. The carriage had gone, of course, but she easily found a cab, and told the man to drive as fast as possible to her house. If only she might get there before Jack got her letter! She was as eager to return as she had been to escape. Suppose he would not take her back! Suppose, when she got there, he would not let her come in! She was n't sure but that he might consider the

letter enough cause for separation, if not for divorce. Then she would be exactly like Mrs. Merrythought, with the flaming hair — no better. She remembered what she had said to Catherine, that some day she should do something dreadful. Well, now she had done it. Poor Jack! How sorry and angry he would be! What should she say to him first? But perhaps he would drive her away before she could speak. Of course he would, if he had got her letter. Well, she had brought it on her own head, and must endure it. Only she wished she could have told him — explained it to him — now that she meant to be good. Very likely he would never understand.

The cab stopped at the door. It was a little open; doubtless one of the men had slipped out to do a little "general courting." She paid and dismissed the cabman and stole through the hall and into the drawing-room.

Jack was sitting in an easy-chair on one side of the fireplace; his head was thrown back and his eyes were shut, but he was not asleep, for the fingers of the hand on his knee clenched and unclenched themselves as she watched him. She swallowed once or twice.

"Jack," she said breathlessly, "I've come home."

He started up.

"You are early to-night," he said. "The Boys' Club must have been less obstreperous than usual this week."

Beatrice stared at him; her eyes looked enormous in her white face.

"Have you seen Aunt Wilhelmina?" she asked.

"No," he said. "They told me she had gone to bed with a bad headache. I supposed, from the telegram she sent me, that she was at the last gasp and wanted me to witness her will. But I was coming back, anyhow."

"Didn't William give you a note?" asked Beatrice, with dry lips that could hardly form the words, "a note from me explaining ——"

"About where you had gone?" said Jack. "Why, he did say something about a note that you had given him, which had blown out of his hand on the way up, and confounded himself in excuses. But it was all right. I knew. Isn't this Thursday? You look tired, my dear. Go to bed and to sleep as soon as possible."

He kissed her gently, and she turned and went to the door.

"I shall have a great deal to tell you to-morrow, Jack," she said, "but I 'll go now."

And after she was gone, he took a folded paper with a torn foreign stamp on it from his pocket and burned it over the lamp.

There seemed to be some things that Jack did understand.

V

RUMOURS

V

RUMOURS

THE afternoon sun was sending long shafts of orange-coloured light across the green carpet and the poppy-cushioned window-seats of Mrs. Donaldson's library. It was called the library because it had several bookcases full of novels and sporting records, and all the newspapers and magazines lay on a table in the corner; because the chairs were more comfortable there than anywhere else in the house, and because the men were allowed to smoke as they pleased and the dogs to sleep on the hearth-rug. There was another room called the music-room because it had a piano in it on which guests sometimes played, and a still more desert apartment went by the name of the drawing-room, because it was overfull of tables and chairs, brocade, gilding, pictures, mirrors, cabinets of Dresden china and silver toys, and nobody ever went into it.

Outside the house it was Autumn, and the curled leaves blew crisply down when the sharp fresh wind rustled the trees, but inside it was as Summer, for the sun and the crackling wood fires made a agreeable warmth, and the scent of hothouse flowers was heavy in the air.

William, the footman, was setting out the tea-table beside the library fire, and Mr. Puffles, the butler, stood with his back to the genial glow and read the morning's paper at arm's length, punctuating each item of news with the comments of a ponderous and thoughtful mind.

"See what trouble they 're having with them Boers," said Mr. Puffles. "You mark my words, William, that war 's not over yet, nor it won't be while there 's a handful of them left together. It 's a bad business getting a badger out of a barrel, a bad business, a bad business."

William said, "I believe you," and finding his chief's attention now engaged by the Chinese question, he succumbed to temptation and swallowed a particularly succulent cake at one mouthful.

"This Chinese matter is a queer thing. It's but right to Christianise them, of course, but they say that it costs more than the salary of two missionaries to convert one heathen. Now that don't seem right, William, it do not seem right."

"Indeed it do not, Mr. Puffles," returned the discreet William, hastily bolting another cake.

"It strikes me McKinley's bit off more than he can chew in the Philippines," continued Puffles, flattered by his subordinate's ready acquiescence in his views, and skimming a fresh column.

Unfortunately, William's resemblance to the President of these United States was here made manifest by so severe a fit of choking that Mr. Puffles was obliged to put down the paper and pat him on the back.

"You don't feel yourself in any way consumptive, I hope, young man?" he said anxiously. "I had to part with my last footman on that account and no other. Consumption is a very serious affair when it once gets hold on a man, a very serious affair."

William barked out that his state was the

result of an accident and in no way to be considered chronic, and the butler turned his attention to the tea tray.

"It 's a strange thing how them drop cakes disappears," he observed sternly. "I can't account for it unless the maids steal them on me in the pantry after the tray is ready. I see Mary sidling out of there with my own eyes not ten minutes ago," and Mr. Puffles, blinking the very eyes which he had accused Mary of annexing, cleared his throat, suggestively, and glanced at the footman for confirmation.

But William, though an ordinary man, was not lacking in chivalry.

"It were n't her," he said shortly. "You may as well know, Mr. Puffles, that I 'm great with Mary. She 's my sweetheart, and don't you forget it, so what 's said agin her is said agin me. She come to the pantry to tell me that she suspicioned as Mr. Maurice was engaged to Miss Julia Silverton; which I had asked her for her observances, as I 'd some notions on the subject myself."

"They have it on them in the servants' hall, I am aware," remarked Puffles, goggling with

interest. "But I hear she have encouraged others."

"The grooms in the stable passed me the word," said William, winking and wiping his eyes, which were yet full of tears from his coughing fit. "The very day she come, and that 's a month ago now, pretty near, Thomas, who sat behind in the T-cart when Mr. Maurice drove her back from the station, Thomas says to me, 'That 's a match,' he says."

"Thomas is a close observer," said the butler, "a very close observer. And if Mr. Maurice makes as good a husband as his brother, Mr. Gilbert, she 'll be a lucky young lady, a very lucky young lady. I 've served in Mr. Donaldson's family now these seven year, and I 've no fault to find with him, nor yet with his wife. No fault to find."

"Mary says that Miss Silverton is free with her money, as a lady should be," continued William, "and she 's awful taking in her ways. There 's the carriage wheels! They 're home. I guess I 'd better light the kettle lamp. They come away after the meet, most likely; they could n't have follered," and he hastily transported himself after Puffles to

the hall, where he appeared as much like an automaton as becomes a self-respecting footman.

A rustle of skirts on the floor and a ripple of high laughter in the air betrayed the approach of things feminine, and Mrs. Gilbert Donaldson entered the library, followed by her guest, Julia Silverton.

Mrs. Donaldson was very beautiful, yellow-haired and white-skinned, with the most delightfully aquiline of little noses and the shallowest, sleepiest, most tawny eyes in the world. The hottest night, the coldest day, the longest journey, the most wearing anxiety, never left a line of trouble or a trace of fatigue on her perfect face, nor softened the tones of her clear, hard voice.

Miss Silverton's good looks were more subtle. Her eyes were dusky blue, and though the surface laughed or languished, underneath they seemed full of the wonderment and mystery of all the ages of the world. The abundant brown waves of her hair clung more closely to her head than the fashion of the day demanded. Her mouth in repose was sweet and serious, despite the little secret curves of

merriment at the corners. Her manner was courteous and considerate and her voice gentle.

"You don't mean to say you are cold, Julia?" said Mrs. Donaldson, as the younger woman drew near the fire, pulling off her gloves and warming her pink palms and wide-spread fingers at the blaze.

"I 'm always cold when the Summer 's over," answered Julia. "I feel stiff all over, like a snake, as soon as the thermometer goes below seventy. How glad I am that tea is ready! Very weak, please, Constance, with two lumps of sugar and no cream. I hate a thick drink!"

"There," said her friend, handing her the cup; "but I don't see how you can drink it like that, it 's so washy."

"You don't see how I can do a great many things that I do, or dislike a great many things that I dislike. It 's a matter of habit."

"Or take so long in making up your mind what you do like, if that 's a matter of habit," interrupted Mrs. Donaldson. "When are you and Maurice coming to an understanding? You really are the most tiresome people to watch through a flirtation."

"There's no occasion for watching us," said Miss Silverton, calmly, drawing the skirt of her brown cloth dress out of the way of a shower of sparks that had just burst in a miniature explosion from the flaming logs. "To all intents and purposes we are engaged."

"Since when?" cried Mrs. Donaldson. "I congratulate you both, but of course I can't pretend to be surprised. Gilbert will be delighted. I wonder whether Maurice has told him! I hope they'll get safely through the run. Maurice was on The Demon, and he's apt to rush his fences when he is fresh." Julia looked anxious. "But it's all right. He rides like a centaur. Shall you announce it at once? What will your ring be?" glancing at her own sparkling fingers.

"I don't know yet," said Julia, laughing, "but *not* a solitaire. No, no, I shall not announce it now. I hate long engagements, and being independent as I am, without any relations and quite my own mistress, I have nobody's opinion to ask. Of course Maurice has told Gilbert, but I should prefer that no one else know for a little while — just until we have our plans more settled."

"Well, I shall advise Maurice to hurry your plans, my dear; we all know you are a very elusive lady."

Julia looked up quickly. "I don't know what you mean," she said.

Mrs. Donaldson laughed her little, hard laugh. "Well, there have been stories about you — and John Herbert, for instance," she suggested.

"There would always have been stories about me and some man or other, because the death of my father and mother left me free, from the moment I was grown up, to do what I pleased with myself and a modest competence. John Herbert was a celebrated artist, and I chose to make a friend of him. Of course, people talked, but I don't see how that points to my elusiveness."

"Are you sure you did not make something else of him?" inquired her hostess. "You may as well admit it; everyone says so."

"You mean a fool or a lover, I suppose," said Miss Silverton, "and that it would be rather a feather in my cap to confess it. Well, I 'm afraid I can't take that glory to myself; but it is true that I was once almost engaged

to Mr. Herbert for a week, and at the end of that time we decided that he could not be both my husband and a celebrated artist. That was almost two years ago. You see he preferred to retain the more independent position. Landscapes are less exacting than ladies, and one can represent them in what moods one pleases, and leave them when one is tired of them."

"Everybody says he was very much in love with you."

"And everybody else says I was very much in love with him, but as a matter of fact I do not think either of us was in love, and we did not understand each other in the least, though we were desperately interested. He made a picture of me once, the only portrait he ever painted, and he used to tell me I had an inscrutable expression, which flattered me immensely. It would have been a wonderful likeness if it had ever been finished. I always promised to go back for the last sittings. Perhaps some day I may."

"It's rather odd his having happened to take a house and come down here this Autumn to paint," remarked Constance, eying her friend narrowly.

But Julia's face gave no sign of discomposure.

"Is he really here?" she said. "What house has he taken, and when did he come? I have not seen him anywhere; have you?"

"No," returned the other. "But Maurice told me he had taken that little farm at the crossroads, and he came down last week."

"I wonder Maurice did not mention it to me."

"Perhaps he was jealous," suggested Mrs. Donaldson.

Maurice's ladylove laughed and helped herself to cake, — her fancy set to the same kind as that beloved by William, the footman.

"I don't think he is of a jealous disposition," said she. "Of course, he is enough a man of the world to pay the woman he likes the compliment of watchful attention, but I think he would consider only himself to blame if my fancy went wandering. He would not be really 'jealous' unless I gave him cause sufficient to lead to his cutting off my nose, or whatever it is they do to untrustworthy ladies. Jealousy is an absurd, futile sort of passion. I can't understand it."

"How would you feel, now, if another woman tried to interfere between you and Maurice?" inquired Constance, curiously.

"Only reasonably amused at her efforts, at present," answered Julia. "I am not afraid, but if I were — if I thought that another woman could take him from me — I should try to find out what there was in her that pleased him, and do it better myself. And if she still attracted him she would be the stronger and have a right to win. At all events, I should not be jealous. I should play as long as there was any chance, and when the game was over throw my cards on the table with a good grace. How I hate cards, by the way! Don't play bridge this evening, Constance, please."

"Well, I like my rights," said Mrs. Donaldson. "And what belongs to me is not to be interfered with lightly, whether I care for it or not. People who fight me have all the trouble they want. You don't really care for your own way, Julia, even when you know what it is. I'm afraid you are rather weak, my dear."

Julia smiled, and then sighed reflectively.

Was she weak? she wondered. In all minor questions she knew she yielded to Constance, who had distinct opinions on every subject, no matter how trifling; but was she weak in the things worth while to be strong about? She hoped not.

The sound of wheels on the gravel attracted their attention at this moment, and Mrs. Donaldson glanced out of the window.

"Heavens!" she exclaimed. "It's Mrs. Cacklethorpe's carriage. Now we shall have all the gossip of the neighbourhood, — why Mrs. Bramble has parted with her cook; who pays Mrs. Mongoose's bills; whether Mr. Crusty drinks or is only insane, and what brings Mr. Herbert to this bailiwick. She will be sure to ask you whether you are engaged to Maurice, so be prepared."

As she spoke the horses drew up at the door, and the bell pealed importantly. In a few minutes the sympathetic voice of Puffles announced Mrs. Cacklethorpe, and that stately lady entered the room, her long nose in the air, her stiff skirt pointed out ahead of her like the cowcatcher of an engine, and her humorous eyes roving from side to side in parrot glances.

Many flounces rustled at her knees and a rich mantle hung from her shoulders.

"I thought I would come in for a few minutes as I was passin', Mrs. Donaldson," she said, "to ask you for the address of that housekeeper you spoke of the other day. If she is very good she might suit my friend, Mrs. Bramble, who is in great difficulties with her servants just now. Really, this servant question, my dear, complicates life dreadfully, and country life especially. Yes. But between ourselves, I 'm afraid the Brambles are a little close, — they count their pennies very carefully, and I have heard that there was a lack of butcher's meat below stairs, and a tendency to scrimp on skim-milk. Of course, when *we* go there everything is of the best, but I fancy they make up for it at other times. Yes. And you know, my dear, servants are human bein's, after all, and they do not like to be starved in the midst of plenty. Of course we can't tell her that, but I thought a good housekeeper ——"

"I 'll give you the address," said Constance, crossing the room to the writing table, "and in the meantime Julia will make you a cup of tea."

"I have not had a chance to say how do you do, Miss Silverton?" Mrs. Cackle-thorpe went on, seating herself beside the tea table. "We married women have such tire-some domestic details always harassin' our minds. Stay single as long as you can, my dear, though if all one hears is true, that won't be for long. You have been here for some time, have n't you? How much longer are you goin' to stay? I suppose you have not quite made up your mind. Well, it is a most charmin' place, as I said to Mr. Herbert — John Herbert, you know — who dined with me last night. You know John Herbert? But of course you do. Yes. I remember when we all thought — Well, well, we must n't gossip too soon this time, must we? — in spite of his sudden appearance in the neighbourhood. And then he 's not the only one, is he? I 'm afraid you modern young women are great hands for flirtin'. Yes. They did say this Summer, at Homburg, that Marian Dexterous was havin' a desperate affair with Herbert. But then Marian's affairs — I really believe they drove her husband into a decline. He had neither the heart nor the spirit to follow

her through so many of them and resist disease, too, so he died, and she went about with her eyes turned up and a crape veil floatin' down her back, and everyone said she looked too lovely, and so young to be a widow. For my part, I don't think that kind of woman is ever too young or too old to be a widow."

"She certainly is a wonderful person," said Julia, handing Mrs. Cacklethorpe her cup. "I don't know anybody who gives you such an impression of health and strength and a sort of joyous vitality as she does. She is always in high spirits. And how she rides! She has the pluck of a school boy."

"Pluck? Yes, I suppose she has," answered Mrs. Cacklethorpe. "I know I'd never have the courage to go flyin' over those great big fences, even if I did have a gentleman on each side of me and one ridin' behind, to pick me up if I fell off."

"I'm afraid he'd be more likely to jump on you, if you fell off, Mrs. Cacklethorpe," said Constance, with her high little laugh. "Here's the address you wanted. The woman used to keep house for old Mr. Don-

aldson; that is why I know something about her. When he and my sister-in-law went to live abroad they took her with them, but she did n't like it, and after trying it for some months has just come home. I don't recommend her. I never recommend servants or dressmakers; but she might do."

"Well, I 'll tell Mrs. Bramble," returned her visitor, rising. "And speakin' of your father-in-law, I must tell you that when I was in Paris they said *he* was perfectly crazy about Marian Dexterous. That was last Winter, you know, when she thought she had enough voice for the stage and went abroad to study. I could n't help thinkin' of it to-day when I saw your husband so attentive to her. Everyone said that old Mr. Donaldson was perfectly infatuated by her, and his daughter was frightened to death for fear he 'd marry her, or leave her a fortune or somethin'. Are n't men strange, my dear? You never know where the old Adam will break out; the older the queerer. Yes. Well, I must go home. Did you know, speakin' of queer people, that they have had to shut up old Mr. Crusty? Could n't stand him, my dear. Took to squirtin' the

garden hose in the drawin'-room winder, because he said the devil was standin' in a corner all dressed in flames. A little touched here," tapping her forehead. "All cocktails, my dear. Good-bye. Mr. Cacklethorpe hates me to keep those horses standin'. Good-bye, Miss Silverton; don't keep us waitin' too long for news."

Mrs. Donaldson touched the bell, and Puffles, who was already stationed in the hall, feeling, doubtless, that it was about time for the visit to terminate, reproachfully conducted Mrs. Cacklethorpe to her carriage.

Julia gave herself a little shake and stretched her arms up above her head with a half-smothered yawn.

"Well, now we know about everything," she said, "and can go peacefully to dress for dinner. I wish the men were home."

"Here they come," exclaimed Constance. "I hear their horses' hoofs on the road. I must tease Gilbert about Mrs. Dexterous."

"I hope there were no falls to-day," said Julia.

"Oh, my dear, when you have been married as long as I have you won't be so nervous

about it. I never worry myself until I have to. It's much the best way."

Julia did not answer. She went to the window and peered out into the dusk. Beyond the terrace, which terminated in a balustrade, with urns that marked the position of the steps leading down to the sunk garden, she could just distinguish the dim yellowish loop of the road where it turned off to the stable. It seemed as if two shadows passed across it, and she sighed a little sigh of relief and slid down among the cushions in the window-seat, resting her head against the wainscoting. They were safe, then. She thought of Maurice with a feeling of tenderness and content and lack of responsibility which was delightful to her. Other men who loved her had sometimes been an effort. He was none. Whatever mood she was in was the mood that seemed to suit him best. He was always pleased with her, and she was so mentally at ease with him that she hardly knew where her ideas ended and his began. He never took things for granted. He never made mistakes. If she wanted to talk, he listened and loved her, and if she preferred

to remain silent he was always able and willing to amuse her. In fact, he was so perfect a lover that Miss Silverton sometimes forgot that the man inside was not the kind of person with whom she could do exactly as she pleased, and upon the few occasions when this was brought somewhat forcibly to her notice it gave her sensations which, though half-indignant, were far from unpleasing. She was beginning to be lazy about choosing her own path through the world. It was a relief at times to give up the management of everything, including herself, to someone who knew the way she wanted to go as well as she did, if not better. Her real power over him she never doubted.

She watched for the two figures to come up from the stable. Somehow it reminded her of her childhood, this sitting curled up in the window-seat, looking out into the gathering darkness. She used to sit so when she was a little girl, a very melancholy little girl, thinking of ships that went down in the night, and children who were lost and could n't get home, and one awful story, which ought never to have been in a child's book at all, about an

evilly disposed gentleman who kept a sort of inn among the mountains somewhere and murdered any traveller who owned a watch of sufficient beauty to excite covetousness. Julia had not minded his desire for watches, nor even his somewhat high-handed method of obtaining them, but he had had a secretive habit of throwing the bodies of his victims down an apparently bottomless well, and it had been one of the horrors of her childhood. Suppose one of them had not been quite dead, and he had gone on falling, falling, down, down, forever into that black hole!

She remembered the story to-night and laughed a little at her old terrors, and thought she would tell Maurice about them. One could tell Maurice anything, secure of his sympathy if not of his approval. She wondered how much he knew about her and John Herbert. They had really been pretty nearly in love with each other, he and she. But, after all, what was there to know? Even supposing he had come here to see her, which was, of course, an absurd thing to think — oh, ridiculous! — there was nothing to know or tell. Constance's voice roused her.

"Are they coming yet, 'Marianna'? You look too pathetic."

Before Julia could reply the silence was broken by the sound of stiffly booted feet stamping themselves limber on the piazza, and by Gilbert's hearty voice exclaiming, as the brothers came in together: —

"He pecked badly when he landed after that last fence. The poor old beggar was tired out, and I nearly went over his head. But I say, Maurice, did n't Mrs. Dexterous go well! I declare, she 's afraid of nothing, and that big brute she rode was out of her hand the whole way. Why did n't you follow, Constance?" he continued, for by this time he had got within speaking distance of his wife. "You could have seen the whole run from the road."

"I did n't care about it particularly," she answered, "and Julia was cold, so we came home."

"Julia must n't be allowed to take cold, on any account," he said, his kind, handsome, red-brown face lighting up with a smile. "Maurice has told me, Miss Silverton, and I never was more pleased about anything. I 'm

awfully glad, and I have nearly shaken his arm off congratulating him. If I had not mistrysted with the branch of a tree in the dark, and so covered one side of my face with green mould, I should ask permission to kiss my future sister-in-law, but as it is ——"

"As it is, your future sister-in-law will kiss you," said Julia, laughing and standing on tip-toe to suit the action to the word, "without waiting to be asked."

Gilbert looked much gratified.

"That is really an awfully nice woman," he could be heard saying to his wife in the hall, as she swept him off to have his bruised cheek treated with some particular remedy of her own.

They had got no further than the foot of the stairs, however, when there was a second tramping of feet on the piazza, the upper half of the door swung open and a laughing, joyous face, with pink cheeks, loosened hair, and a riding hat pushed well off the forehead, looked in.

"Oh, please, Constance dear, have pity on a poor wayfarer," said the owner of the face, settling her accurately tied white stock with one hand and pushing open the lower part of the door with the other. "Crusticuss wrenched

off a shoe scrambling down a bank on the way home, and he has been limping along for miles, until finally I had to get off and lead him. And there we were, ever so far from help, — a great, big, lame horse and a very tired and footsore rider. You can't think how forlorn it was, Mr. Donaldson! And then I thought of you and your comfortable stable, and I stopped and gave Crusticuss to your man. You don't mind, do you? He was so pleased, poor old fellow, not to go any farther."

"Come in, Marian!" cried Constance. "You need n't go any farther, either; we will take care of you and send you home after dinner."

"Of course," echoed Gilbert, looking at her merry eyes and glowing colour with undisguised admiration, "of course you will stay to dinner."

"Well, I was rather hoping you might let me have a bath and a bite, but what shall I do with Mr. Herbert?" looking over her shoulder into the darkness, out of which a tall figure suddenly seemed to grow. "He was taking an owlish prowl at this unearthly hour — to rest his eyes, he said — and I met him just at your gate and made him walk up to the house

with me. Won't you ask him to dine, too, Constance?"

A cordial invitation was extended to Mr. Herbert across the door, and he accepted it with a hesitation of manner that sat somewhat strangely on a person of his decided appearance.

John Herbert was a man whom Nature had singled out for success by giving him the power of belief in himself without destroying his appreciation of other people's beliefs. He took life lightly and tolerantly, but his eyebrows were intensely drawn together, and his gray eyes observed you keenly from beneath them. His red hair rose crested from his head, and he carried his chin forward in a way that those who did not admire him called supercilious. It was evident that he did not quite like the position in which Mrs. Dexterous had placed him, but also that, no matter where he might be placed, he was infinitely capable of making the best of the situation.

"I will dine with pleasure if I may go back to my house to dress," he said. "One feels so demoralised after a long tramp."

"He is so particular," said Mrs. Dexterous, in the possessive tone a woman insensibly

adopts to the man with whom she is flirting. "Now, *I* must stay as I am, and I am much more demoralised by my long tramp than he is. He did n't have to drag hundreds of pounds of lame horse about these dismal lanes."

"Constance will lend you anything you want," promised Constance's husband, hospitably. "You 'd better have a glass of sherry and a biscuit, Mrs. Dexterous. You must be tired. The tea will be cold by this time, and dinner is a long way off."

The whole party moved toward the library.

"Shall we find the lovers there?" asked Marian, with an exaggerated air of caution.

"Etiquette, etiquette, Marian!" cried Mrs. Donaldson from behind. "There are no people answering to that name in this house."

"Oh, well, my dear, we all guess what is going on, if we don't exactly see it," replied the other, laughing mockingly. "We are not so dull as all that, you know."

"You might enlighten the ignorance of the stranger within your gates," suggested Mr. Herbert. "If there is anything going on which a fellow-mortal ought to know, tell me.

I 've been abroad for some time, you must remember."

" It is only some nonsense Mrs. Dexterous chooses to think about my brother-in-law and Miss Silverton, who is staying with me; and what Mrs. Dexterous thinks she does n't mind saying, you know."

" Come, Constance, is n't it really true? " in an engaging whisper.

" So Miss Silverton is staying with you? " said John Herbert. " She used to be a very good friend of mine. I hope she has not forgotten me."

These last words were spoken as they entered the room, and Julia came forward to meet them.

" You are so little forgotten," she answered, shaking hands with Mrs. Dexterous, but looking at him, " that only a few minutes ago I was speaking of you to Mrs. Donaldson."

They stood talking together for a little, apart, while the others formed a group round the fire. Maurice was being rallied by Mrs. Dexterous for having gone less well than usual that day, by reason of having lately lost his heart (pause) — for hunting.

"Is it really you? " said John Herbert.

"What tricks has Fate been playing us that we have not met for so long?"

"You did not know I was here?" (One may be interested in such matters, although one is engaged.)

"Oh, your comings and goings are chronicled in the papers," he answered. "I knew that Miss Julia Silverton had been staying at Meadowford, but I did not know whether I should still find you here. Ladies of your kind are elusive. They seldom stay long in one place."

"That is the second time this afternoon I have been called elusive," complained Julia. "People seem to have a very mistaken impression of my character, but I did not think that I should find you in the ranks of my traducers."

"I don't know who has better cause to be," he responded, laughing. "Everybody knows that I have a right to complain of you."

"There's not a pin to choose between us, so far as our conduct toward each other goes," she said, smiling; "but I don't call you names. On the contrary, I am *very* glad to

see you again, and I hope you are equally glad to see me."

"I 'm going to dine here to-night," he observed abruptly.

"I was always one to accept the inevitable gracefully," answered Miss Silverton.

"May we sit comfortably in a corner and talk frivolously while the others play bridge, as they are pretty sure to do if Mrs. Dexterous has anything to say about it?"

"Frivolously? Not at all. I shall give you a full, true, and particular account of every minute of my life since I last saw you." It is exhilarating to believe one's self admired, and Julia, finding herself in good spirits, could not help being a little mischievous.

"It may even come to that," he said. "A woman will tell a man almost anything rather than sit silent with him after dinner, but perhaps it would be safer for me to play bridge and leave you to the society of — shall we say another adorer?"

"Prudence was ever your strongest failing," returned Julia, "so we had better say another adorer."

"Now, dear Mr. Herbert, if you are going

home to dress, do go, or you will keep Mrs. Donaldson waiting for dinner," broke in Mrs. Dexterous.

Mr. Herbert, recognising the clear voice of duty, gradually took his departure. As he walked down the dark roads he was amused to think of the little interview he had just gone through. So many things had happened since he and Miss Silverton had last spoken together. He remembered that their parting had been commonplace enough on the surface, but he had been really fond of her, so fond of her that he had felt then that he must choose between her and his art. He wondered if she had ever cared for him, and came to the conclusion that she had not. She never would have cared for Donaldson if she had, he decided. The fact that he himself had lately fallen under the special and particular fascination of Mrs. Dexterous seemed to have no bearing on the case. Indeed, he tried not to admit to himself the extent of Marian's power over him. She was handsome, of course, and supremely audacious and amusing. Donaldson, he rather thought, was dull.

Mrs. Dexterous, at the same moment, was

being extremely amusing at his expense. She never spared anybody, not being sensitive, as some women are, for the dignity of the man they regard as their property. A pleasant little morsel of Homburg scandal, in which John Herbert and a forward foreign princess played the principal parts, was detailed for the entertainment of the company, and then she took herself off upstairs, declaring that she must make an exhaustive survey of Constance's wardrobe before she decided what to wear.

Maurice Donaldson and his lady-love were left alone, and they stood looking at each other a moment in silence. Outside — for the shutters were not closed — could be seen the dim outlines of woods against the sky and a shivering little crescent moon drifting along in a veil of cloud. Inside the room was lighted only by the fire, and the flickering shadows on the ceiling seemed to open and shut like the sticks of a great fan. The warm glow shone up into Julia's face as she stood looking down into it, but only outlined Maurice's strong, broad-shouldered figure as he leaned against the mantelpiece, his head

thrown so far back that his face was almost completely in darkness.

"*You* have n't mistrysted with the branch of a tree, I hope," said Miss Silverton, "that you are hiding your head in the shadows there above me."

"No," returned Maurice, laughing. "Your Majesty's property is as yet intact, save and excepting a hole in the heart which you very well wot of."

"You can't say I have not done my best to fill it," she said lightly.

"So full that at the present moment it threatens to overflow and sweep away your royal Highness and all the proprieties." He took her hands in one of his and tilted up her chin with the other. "How I do love you! I suppose I appear to be a decently stolid, self-controlled sort of person, but it is not so always, is it, little Julia?"

"I have known times when you were not," looking up at him with a demure mouth and cheeks that flamed under his kisses, "but I should not like you if I could not make you like me like that."

"What a lot of 'likes'! Is n't there room

for a single 'love' in that sentence? 'Swear me a good mouth-filling oath, Kate, like a lady as thou art,' that you do love me and could n't possibly think of loving anybody else."

Miss Silverton laughed. "And I who told Constance only to-day that you did n't understand the meaning of the word jealousy!"

"I don't," he said; "I could n't be jealous of you, in the ordinary acceptation of the word, though I might do things that would astonish you."

"And yet there are times in every woman's life that her particular man might be jealous of," suggested Julia.

"It 's part of the life of every little fine lady to have men make love to her before her own particular man appears, if you mean that. And of course, the prettier she is the more of them do it."

"And how about *after* he appears?" said she, the curved corners of her mouth deeping.

"After he appears, he takes care of that by making better love to her himself, as you will see," returned Maurice, convincingly. "So your Majesty may manage your subjects as

you please, provided you give me permission to manage you for the rest of your life."

He put a hand on each of her shoulders and bent his square, determined face down to hers.

"Is it a bargain?" he whispered, with his mouth against her ear.

"Maurice," observed his lady-love, gravely, "you have evidently seen a great deal of women. Not that I object. It takes a great many women to educate a husband — look at Solomon! — and I never wanted to be first, but I do want to be last, so swear *me* a good round oath — No, that's absurd. I don't want you to swear. You love me because I choose, and you shall always love me for that reason."

"I could almost swear that it was a little because *I* chose, too," said Maurice, smiling. "You don't suppose I did it on compulsion, do you?"

"I don't suppose you would have done it at all if I had left you alone."

"Oh, that's what you think, is it? Am I to take it, from that, that all previous worshippers at your shrine have been as forcibly attracted?"

Julia nodded. "A great many of them," she observed ingenuously. "But in justice to myself I must admit that, however much they struggled against falling in love with me, they struggled even more against leaving off. I suppose men like some women as soon as they see them, and some women are an acquired taste. But that is the most lasting kind, is n't it, Maurice?"

"If you are that kind, sweetheart."

"How nicely you say that! I took a great deal of trouble to please you and to make you like me, Maurice, and now —" She stopped, looking as shamefaced as a little girl confessing a theft of jam.

"And now?" he echoed encouragingly.

"Now I have to take a great deal more trouble to hide from other people how much I like you."

"Do I please you, dear? You sweet, you darling, there never was any woman in the world like you. You have the most enchanting eyes, and the softest voice, and the most maddening ways ——"

"There 's nothing on earth so good as love, is there?" gasped Julia, as he set her down.

The room was deserted when William the footman came in to remove the tea things and light the lamps. He had also been enjoined by Puffles to keep up the fire, and as he approached the hearth he saw Miss Silverton's handkerchief and her little black-spotted veil, neatly folded and run through with a tiny turquoise pin, lying on the floor near a crop and a pair of gloves that he recognised as Mr. Maurice Donaldson's.

"I 'll take my dying dick," said William to himself — this was a very solemn oath — "that the pair as dropped you was a-courting. I wish old Puffles could see it. Talk about inanimate objecks! I call it circumstantial evidence." And he picked up the discovered articles and deposited them upon opposite corners of the hall table, discreetly.

And the lamps burned with a subdued light, as if they knew they were alone in the library, and the fire blazed and crackled to itself, throwing a deeper red upon the poppy-coloured curtains, which had now been drawn, and the chairs and tables stood so primly in their places that a little bright-eyed mouse, who had defied both the dogs and Mrs. Donaldson's excellent

housekeeping, ran out from beneath the sofa and snatched a crumb of cake which had fallen on the floor when the tea tray was carried away.

II

JULIA had just returned from a drive with John Herbert. They had fallen into the habit of going out together once or twice a week, making elaborate explanations to each other as to why it should amuse them, two non-hunting members of a hunting community, to follow the runs as persistently as they did. Constance, who did not hunt, either, but was extremely fond of riding, generally preferred to go to the meets on horseback, where she never found herself without a companion, for the beautiful Mrs. Donaldson was universally admired. Mr. Herbert had a cart and a sober-minded cob, who, fortunately, drove himself with great dignity and decorum, for his owner openly avowed his distaste for horses and his inability to give them the attention they demanded.

"They require such a lot of looking after," he used to say. "I want something that will just go of itself and leave me free to take an

interest in outside things. Now, one of those slow little tinker's donkeys, the one-step-enough-for-me kind, would suit me admirably."

"Only then we could n't see the run," Julia would observe, taking the reins from him as a matter of course; "and you know you always say how picturesque it is to watch the dogs come streaming over the fields, and the men's red coats like sparks flying along against the blue Autumn haze, with the changing woods for a background. There! I was so struck by the sentence that I committed it to memory. I hope you are flattered."

Flattered or not, he always protested that he was not especially interested in seeing the run, the drive was all he cared about; and she usually responded by offering to conduct him to Scrabble Hill, a place from which an admirable view of all the surrounding country could be obtained, "from the centre all round to the sea;" but somehow, although they had been out several times together, they had never been to Scrabble Hill, while their acquaintance with the short cuts across the plains, their knowledge of the hedges, ditches, brooks, banks, and fences of the neighbourhood was remarkable. An-

other curious thing was that neither of them noticed the other's absorbed silence when Mrs. Dexterous or Maurice Donaldson came galloping into sight.

Of course, people talked. Mrs. Cackle-thorpe said that John Herbert knew which side his bread was buttered on, and was n't going to be such a fool as to let the heiress slip through his fingers a second time. (Julia was hardly an heiress, and John Herbert's work commanded prices that would have made him famous if the pictures themselves had not.) That, for her part, she thought male centaurs had better marry female centaurs, if there ever were such creatures, my dear, which she rather doubted, and she believed that Marian Dexterous would make a very good wife for a riding man. Yes. Always in the saddle, you know, and out in the open air, where her high spirits could do nobody any harm. Mrs. Cackle-thorpe only wished that Maurice Donaldson would take a fancy to her, and perhaps she 'd encourage him after she had finished making a fool of Gilbert. Mrs. Cacklethorpe was distressed on poor dear Constance's account, of course, but then these cold, beautiful women,

my dear, they never could hold the affection of a warm-hearted fellow like Gilbert. She was also sorry for Maurice, whom she understood to be ready to cut his throat for the sake of that sly little Miss Silverton.

Sly little Miss Silverton and wily Mr. Herbert, unmindful of comment, drove together, just the same, and secretly watched, with their hearts in their throats, the wonderful performances of their respective true loves. Only Mr. Herbert would not admit to his head how much his heart was in love with the widow, while Julia took every opportunity of proving to herself how superior was Maurice in every way to every man whom she had ever known.

She wished that he did not love hunting so much. Three afternoons in the week it took him away from her, and she was constantly frightened lest some accident should happen to him, and prayed, in violent pagan gusts of terror, that such might be averted. But, being as near a reasonable person as a mere woman can be, she said as little as possible of her fears and as much as possible of her pride in him, trying to emulate Constance, whose nerves were so perfect that she could watch Gilbert

through a rattling fall with an outwardly unmoved countenance. Men hated to be made a fuss over, she said.

But on this particular day, when Julia returned to the house, she found Mrs. Donaldson there before her in a distinctly annoyed frame of mind, her eyes quite wide open with anger and her mouth firmly set.

"Really," she said, "Gilbert is too tiresome! I haven't been able to ride to-day, because my new saddle has gone to the village to have a little more stuffing put into it, and when I came to inquire I found he had lent my second one to Marian Dexterous, because she said hers rubbed her horse's back. Now, it's all very well for Gilbert to be generous, but that saddle was mine, and he ought to have asked me before he promised it to anybody. He won't do it again in a hurry! He is entirely too fond of lending things in a good-natured way. I hate to have my things lent. I don't mind giving them outright — that's different. I don't know what has got into Gilbert lately. I think he is bewitched." She laughed in a half-amused, half-annoyed way, and went on: —

"Poor old Gilbert! He 's so unsuspicious that anybody can circumvent him. The other evening I met the gardener's boy coming out of the gate with a big basket of chrysanthemums, and when I asked what he was doing with them he said Mr. Donaldson had told him to leave them at Mrs. Dexterous's cottage on his way home. So I just took a card out of my cardcase — I happened to have been paying some visits — and wrote an affectionate message on it and sent it with the flowers. Marian must have been surprised. She did n't know that I had been watching her little games. She is trying to pique John Herbert by flirting with these other men. I know her ways so well! 'Dear Mr. Donaldson, won't you give me a lead over this fence? I know nobody will take it but you,' and, 'Is n't it too bad that the flowers I ordered for dinner to-night have n't come? What shall I do, Mr. Donaldson? You always help poor and deserving people.' And that goose of a Gilbert thinks her delightful. Well, I like Marian myself, but I am not going to stand any nonsense of this sort."

"But what difference does it make?" said

Julia. "You could n't be really jealous of her. I should think her manœuvres would only amuse you."

"You don't understand, my dear," said Constance. "I 'm not in the least jealous, only I won't have any woman imagine that she can amuse herself with my property. And these rides home from the run where they always miss their way — the idea! when Gilbert knows every stone in every road for miles about — and these loiterings over afternoon tea, and these invitings of herself to dinner are going to stop here and now, Mrs. Cacklethorpe notwithstanding."

"Well, it 's natural," answered Julia, with a little shrug, "that you should know your own affairs best, but if I were you I should just ignore the whole thing."

"Opinions differ. You may not care what people say about you, but I don't like to have it gossiped all over the country every time Mrs. Cacklethorpe sees Gilbert with Marian, and he shall have a piece of my mind before we dine there to-night."

"Are we dining at the Cacklethorpes' to-night?" asked Julia. "I had quite forgotten

it. I wonder if Maurice remembers? I think I 'll go down and remind him."

"I did not hear them come in," said Constance. "Why don't you ring and ask first?"

"I heard their voices in the hall a few minutes ago," answered Miss Silverton, blushing a little, angry blush as she noticed the amused smile with which her remark was greeted. "My ears are sharper than my tongue still."

She left Constance's room, in which the two ladies had been sitting, crossed the gallery and ran lightly down the wide, red-carpeted staircase. She had to pass through the drawing-room, and before she could reach the library door she heard a rustle of paper and Gilbert's voice, saying: —

"So he 'll be starting directly, and what the deuce he means by it Heaven only knows. All this mystery as to the cause of his journey, and his begging me to keep it quiet, and all that sort of thing, are most unlike him. Poor old governor! I hope he 's not getting queer in his head, or anything. His letter is really rather crazy, don't you think so?"

"If anything were wrong," answered Maurice, "Alice would be sure to write. And if she had not thought he was fit to come alone, she would have come with him."

"Unless he gave her the slip," suggested Gilbert. "That is possible. Here's Julia!" seeing her in the doorway. "Is Constance coming down? No? Well," throwing away his cigarette, with a regretful gesture, "I must go up and see her. I wonder what time she ordered the carriage for. What a confounded nuisance it is having to go out to dinner to-night!"

His tall, slightly bowed figure disappeared through the portières, and the two fox terriers who had been asleep on the hearth rug rose, yawned, stretched first their fore and then their hind quarters, and followed him.

Julia came and sat down in a low chair near the fire, and Maurice, rising, dragged his close beside her and possessed himself of her hands for a minute, which he kissed one after the other and then put back in her lap.

"Such a nice, satisfactory little lady to come home to!" he said.

"Am I not?" responded Miss Silverton,

leaning her cheek against his for an instant and as rapidly withdrawing it. "No, Maurice, not for a minute — I mean, not again for a minute. I want to tell you. I could n't help hearing something Gilbert was saying to you as I came into the library. Was it something I ought not to have heard? It began about a mysterious journey and your father."

"Oh, it 's all right, dear. There is nothing you should n't know. Only Gilbert is worried because my father writes that he is coming over at once on business, and that as the business is private and particular he does n't want anything said about it. He says, 'not even to your wife' — writing to his eldest son, you understand, which naturally does not forbid me to tell mine, especially as she happens to have heard it already, through no fault of anybody's."

"Do you think your father will like me, Maurice? I should think he would. I am very pretty in my manners to old gentlemen. Is he hard to please?"

"The most amiable old person who ever existed. I 'm the only person you will find it hard to please. I am so critical and fault-

finding where you are concerned. I say, Julia, why don't you hasten your fineries a little, or get them afterward, and be married while he is out here? It seems to me it would be very dutiful, and not entirely without other merits as a plan."

"Your passion and fire carry everything before them," said Julia, laughing. "I will consider the proposition. Do you really want me to marry you so soon?"

"Do I really want you to —? Well, of all the disingenuous remarks I ever heard you make — and they have not been few — that is the most disingenuous. You deserve to be picked up and carried off to the nearest magistrate, and married out of hand, without benefit of clergy; and I'd do it for the comparatively insignificant sum of twenty-five cents."

"And I've left my purse upstairs," said Julia, regretfully.

Now, while these two were talking together happily enough downstairs, a conversation of a very different nature was taking place in the room above them. Constance had not neglected the opportunity of telling her husband, not only what she thought of his conduct, but

what everybody else thought or would be likely to think. If she had put it on the ground of unkindness and lack of consideration toward herself, the good-natured Gilbert would have been softened in a minute, but to be told plainly that you are being made a fool and a cat's-paw of by the woman you rather admire, while all your neighbours look on and laugh, is quite enough to vex any gentleman, especially after he has had a fatiguing run and a worrying letter from his father.

For once Gilbert permitted himself to be sulky, and after talking until his arguments were exhausted and his patience also, he ended by absolutely declining to discuss the matter further or to go out to dinner with her, either. Constance could not believe her ears at first, but he made it plain to her.

"But, my dear Gilbert, you *can't* do a thing like that!"

"Oh, can't I?" returned he, for once thoroughly put out. "You just watch me and see. I'm dead tired, and I am not going to their infernal old dinner, and you may make what excuses for me you please."

"Well, then, I had better stay at home,

too," said Constance, helplessly — she was not used to her husband in this mood. "It will at least keep their table even. Oh, it's absurd, Gilbert. You must go. We accepted days ago."

"I am not going, and that is the end of it," he answered, walking toward his dressing-room door. "You had better telephone and say so, but I advise you to go. You won't find me a very pleasant companion," and he shut the door with more emphasis than seemed altogether necessary.

Mrs. Donaldson telephoned, and found that, while the loss of her husband's company was regretted, her own was still greatly desired, the voice of her hostess assuring her that she always had an extra man or two. "They like to come when they are stayin' at the club, you know, my dear, and it's convenient to have them, in case of accidents."

As he heard his brother pass the door on his way downstairs, Gilbert called him into the dressing-room.

"I 'm not going to-night," he said. "I 'm dog-tired, and Constance has got some ridiculous idea into her head about Marion Dexter-

ous and me — she can be most exasperating when she likes — and she said so much that I rather lost my temper for the evening. Anyhow, I said I would n't go, and I won't; but I declare," went on the easy-going fellow, "I hate to be on bad terms with people. Always did, you know; and I don't really want to vex her. So I wish, my dear boy, you 'd do something for me to-night if Mrs. D. is there, as I 'm pretty sure she will be. You see, I was going to drive her over to the club to-morrow to see the big golf match. I wish you 'd just get an opportunity to say to her that I have to go to town on business. I 'll go, too," added Gilbert, self-righteously. "There ought to be something for me to attend to."

"I 'll make a point of mentioning it," said Maurice, gravely; "both your going and your regrets that you cannot have the pleasure of taking her to the golf match."

"I suppose *you* would n't take her?" continued Gilbert, suggestively.

"I am driving Julia. Don't you worry about Mrs. Dexterous. She will manage her affairs perfectly without assistance from either

of us. I am afraid you are falling a little under her influence, old man. Pull up!"

When he went down Constance and Julia were standing in the hall, peach-colour and pink cloaked, with impatient, satin-shod feet tapping the floor.

"Do come along, Maurice!" cried his sister-in-law. "We have nearly two miles to drive and only five minutes to do it."

The horses travelled fast, however, and they were not very late. Mrs. Cacklethorpe, in a splendid gray brocaded gown covered with gold sunflowers, received them very graciously, and told Maurice that he must take his brother's place and Mrs. Dexterous down to dinner.

"It 's all right, my dear," she said to Constance; "I was n't goin' to lose your society if Mr. Gilbert had got a chill. It 's this loiterin' home after huntin' that does it. They get so hot ridin' at that breakneck pace and then they go crawlin' home, and it 's no wonder. I suppose you 're glad enough to get them back with all their bones. I always have an extra man or two dinin' at this season, in case of accident, as I told you. Did they announce dinner? Yes. Here 's Mr. Cacklethorpe for

you. Oh, by the way, Mrs. Bramble likes the housekeeper now, but it won't last, my dear."

The party was as well assorted as such parties usually are. Constance and Mr. Cacklethorpe — whose personality was so faint beside that of his wife that nothing remained of it but a pair of wistful eyes and a little dim voice that occasionally said funny things — sat at one end of the big table, and looked across many flat beds of red leaves and purple asters, until they beheld Mrs. Cacklethorpe and a very famous lawyer with a prominent nose, white whiskers, and the hearty laugh of conscious humour, opposite to them. Mrs. Dexterous, Maurice, a merry, talkative little actress, and a man who would not talk to her because he was bewitched by Constance's beauty, occupied one side, and Julia, Mr. Herbert, two hunting souls and a lad made up the other.

Maurice had not been at all ill-pleased to take in Mrs. Dexterous, thinking it a good opportunity to deliver his brother's message, and, incidentally, to see for himself what sort of woman she was. That she was handsome he could not deny — not with the cold, still, starlight beauty of Constance, nor the subtle,

changing April charm of Julia, but like a warm, breezy, sunshine-flooded day. He looked at the beautiful, fresh pink-and-white of her colouring and the rather too even edges of her very white teeth, which showed when she smiled; at her firm throat and broad, creamy shoulders, and did not blame Gilbert very much if he had enjoyed hours spent in the society of anything so good to look at and so gloriously alive. Her conversation was a slight shock to a sober-minded man, but it was certainly amusing.

"But feel my arm," she was saying to the lawyer, who had been complimenting her on her prowess in the field. "I 'm just like that all over. It would take more than that to tire me."

The eminent gentleman, who had furtively laid a few fingers on the marble member proffered him, hastily withdrew them, as if he feared he might be called upon to make further tests, and plunged his nose into his champagne glass.

"It 's funny how people change," she went on, turning to Maurice, whom she had so far ignored. "I used to be a thin, delicate girl, who had not the strength of a rat nor the spirit of a mouse, and always cried when anything

agitated her. I remember I cried for a month because I thought they would not let me marry Dan" (Daniel had been the name of her late husband), "and then the day I was married I cried all the way up the aisle and all the way down again."

"Cursed with a granted prayer," said Maurice, impertinently.

She looked ostentatiously perplexed for a moment and then smiled.

"They say you will be in that position yourself soon," she answered.

"It's astonishing what idle and malicious people *will* say," he returned tranquilly. "They haven't spared you either, lately, you know."

"I don't want to hear what they say," she laughed.

"And I haven't the faintest intention of telling you."

"I don't think you are very amiable," she said, turning her shoulder to him.

Somehow the time did not seem very well chosen for the giving of Gilbert's message. Moreover, Maurice felt he had been rude and must try to atone as best he could.

"On second thoughts," he said, "I will be amiable and tell you, with a view to your future amendment. They say that you go about the earth, like a certain other enemy of mankind, seeking whom you may devour, and that you don't always stop to inquire whether you are poaching on other people's preserves. Grandfathers, fathers, husbands, brothers — they all go down before you, and naturally their owners don't like it."

Mrs. Dexterous looked him full in the face for a minute.

"And neither do their brothers' keepers, apparently," she said; but before he could answer, her white-whiskered neighbour, who had sufficiently recovered from his first shock to be courting another, addressed her with some pleasant, ponderous commonplace, and she turned away. Maurice began to talk to the little actress, whose cavalier was still dazedly absorbed by his admiration for Constance.

The air, warmed by the lights, was blown in little puffs by the women's fans. The servants passed swiftly to and fro, changing plates, pouring out champagne; a candle shade took fire and had to be seized and borne off by a

stolid footman. Mr. Cacklethorpe was engaging the attention of Julia with a humorous story, the point of which had just slipped his memory. John Herbert was listening to and watching the lady of his unacknowledged affections. The fragments of talk pieced themselves together oddly.

"And I 'd quite forgot my lines, you see," from the actress. "And as for my collar button, it was lost down my back, somehow," said Mr. Cacklethorpe, giving up the point of his story. "Nobody knows what she suffered with that man, my dear," his wife's voice could be heard. "And I could n't but feel it was a dispensation of Providence when he had to be locked up." "But I had his hoofs cut off and mounted as inkstands for my most intimate friends," said the sporting lady. "And everyone in Paris knows how perfectly disreputable they are," exclaimed Marian's clear, loud voice. "Why, they dyed their hair red and took to skating in white velvet knickerbockers! Dear old Mr. Donaldson was so scandalised the first day he saw them that he could hardly take his eyes off them."

"Do you mean to say my father has taken

to skating?" asked Maurice, in some surprise, addressing Mrs. Dexterous.

"Oh, no," she said, laughing. "He liked to go with me when I skated at the *cercle*. We were great friends, your father and I. By the way, I had a letter from him the other day, and he spoke of coming over soon. He's the dearest old gentleman in the world, and I am devoted to him. You must be sure to ask me to come and dine with you the very first night he comes. I know he'd like it."

But Maurice, for once, was incapable of reply. An astounding thought had struck him. Could it be? Mrs. Cacklethorpe's gossip, which Constance had repeated to them as a good joke; the mysterious letter to Gilbert, the mere fact of his father's having written to Mrs. Dexterous, — all these things flashed through his mind, and were dismissed as ridiculous and impossible. Still, old gentlemen did sometimes do astounding things.

When he recovered himself Mrs. Cacklethorpe was making the signal for departure, and the women gradually melted out of the room. Then he remembered that he had never given Gilbert's message, and supposed,

with a sigh, that he must manage it later. He was among the first men to enter the drawing-room, and seeing the lady standing alone by the window, strolled up to her with such evident intention that the sporting gentleman, who greatly desired to talk to her, was reluctantly obliged to abandon his purpose. She turned as Maurice paused beside her, and looked at him in some astonishment, for she had expected the approaching steps to be those of John Herbert.

"I 'm not going to stay," he said, laughing. "There are too many people in line, but I forgot at dinner to give you a forlorn message from my brother, who regrets extremely that he is obliged to go to town to-morrow and cannot therefore go somewhere or do something delightful in your society."

"Oh," returned Mrs. Dexterous, frankly, "that 's all right; we were only going to drive. There 's a golf match at the club. Are n't you going?"

"I may," he answered. "It all depends on—" he checked himself at the pronunciation of his lady's name, and before he could go on Marian interrupted him. She had seen Mr.

Herbert stealthily working his way round to her by the four walls (he being in that state of lunacy when a circuitous manner of approach is believed to render the approacher all but invisible), and resolved to punish him for his tardiness and lack of spirit.

"If it depends upon me," she said hastily, "I say the match, by all means. You *were* going to ask me, were n't you, dear Mr. Maurice? And you may feel quite free, as far as your house-party is concerned, for I know Miss Silverton is going with Mr. Herbert. He is quite attentive to her, is n't he? I wonder if he means business this time?"

If there were anyone who had reason *not* to wonder it was herself, seeing that the bewitched artist had been trembling on the verge of a passionate proposal to her three times that afternoon, but she felt that he was not quite ardent enough yet, and she knew very well that if one has a rival the part of wisdom is to force her companionship upon the gentleman one wishes to disenchant. So she lied boldly and trusted to her further ingenuity to arrange the second part of her plan.

"I 'm afraid there is some mistake," said

Maurice. "I am quite sure Miss Silverton promised to drive with me, otherwise, of course, I should be delighted to take my brother's place."

"Then that's an engagement," she cried, with a mischievous laugh. "You will find it is all arranged, dear Mr. Donaldson."

He gave her a polite but incredulous bow and took his departure as Herbert joined her.

"You were a long time in coming, my good friend," she observed reproachfully. "If you had been a little quicker you might have saved me from rather an awkward predicament. Gilbert Donaldson cannot drive me to-morrow afternoon, and Maurice said he should be delighted to take me if he thought you would look after Miss Silverton. I had to say something, so I answered I was sure you would."

"Maurice, too!" growled John Herbert. "By Jove, you're insatiable! Can't you even spare a man who is supposed to be just engaged?"

"I'm not so sure he is engaged. You would n't have thought so if you had heard us taiking. These rumours about people some-

times have no foundation. Besides, what could I do? Cry out, 'No, you must go with your own fiancée; I want Mr. Herbert'—not knowing whether she *was* his fiancée, any more than I knew if—I wanted Mr. Herbert. I hope I am more discreet than that. Come, and we'll settle it with her now. She looks bored to death among those men. And then I shall slip away quietly. Shall I give you a lift home?"

She managed to pause just long enough by Julia's chair to arrange matters, giving the impression that Maurice was rather under obligations to drive her—as indeed he was, though not of his own seeking—and then disappeared, taking the artist with her.

Her departure stirred the surface of conversation a little, and the party soon afterward broke up, to the joy of stiff coachmen and stamping horses.

"What did Mrs. Dexterous say to you about to-morrow, Julia?" asked Maurice, as they were driving home. "I felt mischief in the air."

"She told me more or less plainly that she wanted to go with you," returned Miss Silver-

ton, " but she wanted me to imagine something very different."

" Well, I have n't the faintest intention of going with her. I am driving with you."

" Oh, you 'd much better," said Julia, not sorry to show Constance her superior methods. " It 's all arranged now, and I 've promised to go with Mr. Herbert."

All the same, she felt a little more tired in body and spirit than she could account for. She said she was sleepy and settled herself back in her corner with closed eyes, but somehow under the lids danced little pictures of Maurice at table with Mrs. Dexterous, Maurice talking to her again after dinner, and Maurice as he might look talking to her when Julia was not observing them. Nobody spoke until the carriage stopped at the door. The correct Puffles stood in the hall ready to receive them.

" You do look sleepy," said Maurice, as he helped Julia out. " And I fancy you are cold, too. That is an absurd little garment to be out in on an Autumn night. Come into the library, by the fire, and have a glass of sherry or something. Puffles, bring some sherry or

port for Miss Silverton. What are you going to have, Constance?"

Constance yawned. "I 'm not going to sit up and chaperone you two," she said; "I am going straight to bed. Good-night, Julia, and remember, I don't approve of ignoring things."

"What on earth is she talking about?" asked Maurice.

"Oh, it is n't anything. It does n't matter. Nothing matters but our liking each other," exclaimed Julia, patting his shoulder as he poured out her port. "I did n't care much for the dinner to-night; did you, Maurice?"

"Care for it!" he echoed. "I thought it was the most infernal evening I ever spent."

And so are we rewarded for entertaining our friends; but Julia went off to bed feeling distinctly comforted, and her dreams were of pleasant things.

Maurice, on the contrary, saw his father skating vigorously round and round the *cercle* after Mrs. Dexterous, who was following John Herbert, while Gilbert pursued Mr. Donaldson and Maurice pursued Gilbert.

He was careful, however, to say nothing

about either his dreams or his suspicions to his brother next day. The thing was preposterous.

Constance, having, perhaps, some inkling of her husband's reason for flying to town, resolutely opposed it, and rather than quarrel with her again he permitted himself to be absolutely flaunted in the face of Mrs. Dexterous and the public. But he must have made explanations of a kind in private, for the lady was not less gracious than usual when they met at the golf match, and only asked him when he *did* go to town if he would be so good as to bring her a certain new kind of bit she saw advertised, warranted to control the most confirmed runaway.

So things went on peacefully enough for the next few days. The sun shone, and the wind blew, and the trees turned red, and people walked and talked, and abused each other for distinctive virtues and found excuses for mutual faults, and dined together, and commented on the dinners, and told all the funny little stories they knew about the diners. Mrs. Cackle-thorpe said that it was the very pleasantest Autumn she had spent at Meadowford. Not

one single scandal, my dear, and everybody out in the open air all day, which was so healthy. Of course, one could n't help noticin' that Marian Dexterous was settin' her cap for the other Donaldson, and, mark her words, that would be the next gossip. Which, if her words were marked, was true enough. As a matter of fact, Maurice, haunted by occasional filial fears, did study Mrs. Dexterous more or less attentively from different points of view. Julia did n't quite like it, but convinced, as she could not help being, of his love for herself, she resolved to conceal the surprise that even his spasmodic interest in Marian occasioned her. She was a person of resources, too, and though she knew she could never rival Mrs. Dexterous in the hunting-field, she was aware that to teach a pretty, clever woman anything is far from disagreeable to a man, so she sent for her habit and announced her intention of riding with Maurice, if he did not mind giving her the benefit of his instruction on the off days. She did not consider it necessary to mention the extent of her experience, which, although not great — for she was timid with horses — was enough to raise her above the

average, and on the first occasion of their going out together he was enchanted by her pluck and progress.

"Why, you will be cutting down the field in no time, Julia," he said, with pride. "I 'll tell you what, Gilbert won't be riding to-morrow — he 's going to town — and he shall lend you The Prophet. He 's steady as a church and does n't pull an ounce, and we will go out and lark a bit in the afternoon, and I 'll give you a lesson in jumping."

Inwardly alarmed, but outwardly as bold as a lion, Julia said that nothing would give her more pleasure, and scanned the sky anxiously in search of some promise of stormy weather. She had not prepared herself to go to quite such lengths as leaping for a lover, but she was determined not to falter now.

"The Prophet is a pretty big beast," she said, dubiously. "I suppose I shall feel as if I were flying over the moon. I hope I can manage him."

"Finest sensation in the world. You 'll love it," mumbled Maurice, who was lighting a cigarette. "And you 'll look awfully well on him, my pretty little lady."

"I'd ride a griffin if you said that to me, dear," said Julia, demurely.

"But if you knew how much I want to kiss you when you say those things you'd be more careful on the public highway," replied Maurice; and so they rode home in great peace and amity with themselves and all the world, though Julia felt many misgivings and sudden faintings of the heart whenever she thought of the expedition to which she was committed.

Fate, however, intervened in her behalf, for, although the weather was fair, Gilbert in town, and The Prophet at her disposal, Maurice himself was obliged to cry off. He had received, he told her in the course of the morning, a telephone message from the club demanding his presence at a special meeting for the disciplining of a certain refractory member, and as the refractory one was a friend of his — a mere boy, whom he considered more sinned against than sinning — he wished to be present to see fair play.

Julia heartily agreed, and came out on the steps after luncheon to wave him a forgiving and relieved farewell as the Hempstead cart

disappeared out of the gate. Constance and she took the dogs for a walk and returned about four o'clock, to find that Mrs. Cacklethorpe, Mrs. Bramble, Mrs. Bramble's pretty daughter, Rose, and two or three men had driven over to tea.

Everybody was in good spirits, including the dogs, who stood on each side of Mrs. Donaldson, barking for biscuits in the most engaging way.

"And so you have been for a walk, Miss Silverton?" said Mrs. Cacklethorpe. "You ought to ride, you know; great thing for keepin' young, they say, not that you need trouble about that for some time yet, but all the girls ride here. It's the only way they can see the men. Yes."

"We have managed to see several by staying at home," answered Julia, good-humouredly. Mrs. Cacklethorpe always amused her. "But as it happens, I had been going to ride this afternoon, only Mr. Donaldson was obliged to go to some meeting of the Meadowford Club. Now you see how fortunate it is, for I am not missing your visit."

But by this time Mrs. Cacklethorpe's eyes

were wandering about the room, and she did not appear to have heard the compliment.

"My dear," she said in a loud whisper to Mrs. Bramble, "why don't you marry your girl to young Mongoose there — an only son? Father dead. Money secure. Mother a handsome woman, who may marry again any day. Stories about her? Well, yes, of course, but you could afford to ignore them."

Mrs. Bramble's sharp little nose went up in the air.

"I 'm in no haste to marry my daughter to anybody, Mrs. Cacklethorpe," she said. "I am not in favour of early marriages. I think girls improve by being kept under home influence as long as possible. Not even brought out, you know, until they are quite mature."

"Well, my dear," returned that lady, "you may be right. But I tried that plan with an English waterproof I once bought, and it did n't do. I kep' it and kep' it and kep' it, and when I took it out it all went to splits. I would n't answer for it that girls might n't do the same."

Julia fell into such ill-concealed fits of laughter at this that she was obliged to get up and

join Miss Bramble and Mr. Mongoose at the window. They were discussing whether a brown spot above the trees was or was not the observatory on the top of Scrabble Hill. The two other men were drawn into the argument, and Constance was appealed to for field-glasses. She provided some old ones from the hall table and then recollected that she had given Gilbert a beautiful new pair — the very latest thing in field-glasses — for his birthday, and went out of the room to fetch them.

When she came back the whole party was assembled at the window, greatly interested in the evolutions of two horsemen, or rather a horseman and a horsewoman (as described by Mr. Mongoose, who happened to have the glasses), who were apparently riding a race across country.

"Can't you see yet who they are?" cried Mrs. Cacklethorpe.

Constance raised the more powerful glasses to her own eyes. "It's Gilbert," she said in a low, angry voice to Julia, who stood beside her. "Gilbert and Marian. I suppose he had his horse sent to the station to meet him, and then joined her somewhere. It is really

too much, but she will be sorry for it, and so will he."

"They are coming awfully fast, whoever they are," said Mr. Mongoose. "I almost think the lady's horse is running away."

"She's down!" cried Constance. "She's down! What an awful-looking fall! Is the horse up? Oh, I hope she is n't hurt!"

"How did it happen?" "Do you know who it is?" "How far off are they?" "Send my carriage." A perfect babel of voices broke out.

"I'm afraid it's Mrs. Dexterous. Her horse fell at a fence. They were coming too fast, as Mr. Mongoose says — I think she is up again, but I'm afraid she must be hurt. If you will allow me, Mrs. Bramble, I'll send your carriage. I think they are pretty near the station road."

"There's somebody driving along in a Hempstead cart," said Julia, who had picked up the glasses. "It must be Maurice. There! He's stopped, and they are walking across the fields to him; she can't be much hurt, after all. I am so glad!"

"The groom's got out and she's got in,"

said Mr. Mongoose, continuing in a serial manner. "And the groom is going to lead her horse home. The man who was riding with her is coming along again across country. Jove, he can ride!" And the young gentleman stood silent in admiration.

"Well, I think we ought to be going, Mrs. Donaldson," said Mrs. Bramble. "I hope we shall find the accident has not been serious. Very likely we may meet them on the road and I may be able to find out about it."

"My dear, I 'm not goin' just yet," declared Mrs. Cacklethorpe. "There 's no tellin' what has happened, and it 's better to be on the spot, and then you know the truth of it if anybody asks you. They are comin' this way, are n't they?" she anxiously inquired of Mr. Mongoose.

"The cart is hidden by the woods," he said, "but the man on horseback turned in at this gate."

As he spoke, hasty steps crossed the piazza, and Maurice Donaldson entered the room; he had evidently been riding fast and furiously.

"I wish you would telephone for the doctor, Constance," he said. "Mrs. Dexterous has

had a fall. I think she is only badly shaken, but one never can tell, and it 's safer to have Wise's opinion."

"I tell him to come *here*, I suppose," said Constance, quietly. She was invaluable in all emergencies and never asked unnecessary questions.

"Yes," he returned. "Gilbert is driving her here."

He was so occupied in answering the eager questions put to him that he hardly noticed the fact that Julia neither spoke nor looked at him.

But Mrs. Cacklethorpe noticed, and did not need to guess the reason.

III

Mrs. Dexterous's fall, being followed by no serious consequences to herself, soon ceased to be the subject of gossip in Meadowford. For when, as was the case with the curse of the Jackdaw of Rheims, "nobody seems one penny the worse" for an accident, people soon lose interest in discussing it. But it had

not been without effect on the Donaldson household. Julia, clinging resolutely to her principles, had asked no explanation from Maurice, but Constance soon wrung from the reluctant Gilbert an admission that he had ordered his horse to meet him at the club, and had driven there from the station for the purpose of riding with Marian. He had, in obedience to orders, brought her down a new bit which she was anxious to try on a pulling horse, but being himself in great pain and half-blinded by a cinder that had got into his eye on the way down, he had later, finding Maurice at the club, begged his brother to keep the engagement for him, and driven at once to the doctor's. This seemed simple and natural enough. Gilbert was incapacitated, and since the lady insisted on riding a dangerous horse, it appeared to be the duty of a man and a brother to get into such riding clothes as he kept on the spot, and do his best to look after her.

The bit had not proved much of a success; the horse had got out of her hand and had given her a rattling fall. That was all there was to it. Julia understood perfectly, of

course. No one could help understanding how it happened.

All the same, Julia wished she had been less confidential to Mrs. Cacklethorpe that afternoon. It gave her an uncomfortable feeling every time she thought about it and remembered that lady's half-amused, half-pitying look when Maurice came in.

She had ridden only once since that day. He said his nerve was shaken, and he would not have her risk her neck riding across country, and she thought he could not enjoy just pottering about among the lanes. So the rides were discontinued, and Miss Silverton was embarrassed by no further offers of a mount on The Prophet, about which she had her own thoughts.

Constance noticed that both Maurice and Gilbert seemed preoccupied and held frequent consultations. She questioned her husband, but for once that easy-going person was discreet and kept his own counsel.

"It would never do to show Constance the letter I got from Alice the other day," he said. "She'd be for locking up the old gentleman at once, or doing something very

decided. I 'm all for peace and persuasion. I don't think he 'll really do it."

"And I don't see that we can possibly interfere if he does," returned Maurice. "If he chooses to marry a young woman, and she chooses to accept him, what are we to do about it? He 's quite independent of us."

"And we are quite independent of him, thank Heaven!" said Gilbert, piously. "But no man likes to have his father make a fool of himself at the ripe age of seventy, especially when he has lived until then a godly, righteous and sober life, respected by all who know him. Hang it all! I feel I *must* remonstrate with him, talk to him like — like an uncle you know."

Maurice laughed. "It was n't so long ago that Constance was talking to you on the same subject."

"But not like an uncle," observed Gilbert. "I 'm afraid the fact of her being a woman and my wife interfered a little with the exercise of that calm judgment which should be brought to bear on an affair of this kind. I say, Maurice, I don't believe Mrs. D. would do it, even if the governor means business. I

don't think she is that kind. What do you think?"

"It depends a good deal on what you mean by 'that kind.'"

"Why, the kind of young woman who marries an old man for money."

"Oh!" said Maurice. "Well, there seem to be a good many subdivisions of even that kind, and I 'm not prepared to say. Let me see Alice's letter again. I wonder why she sent it to the club."

"I wonder why, too. If I had n't happened to go to town that day I should not have got it at all, most likely. At any rate, not before he landed."

"I don't suppose it would have made much difference," said Maurice, reading: —

My dear Gilbert, — Papa has suddenly announced his intention of sailing on the 9th. He refuses to take me with him, pleading the suddenness of the start and the shortness of his probable stay. He says it is business of a private and important nature, but I heard him tell old General Blunderbuss (with whom he is more confidential than he is with me) that "one could not be too careful in dealing with a woman whose reputation might suffer for ever

if one made a mistake." You know how chivalrous the dear old gentleman is, and, remembering the great admiration he had for her when she was in Paris, and what rumours were started at the time, I cannot help fearing that he has determined to marry Marian Dexterous, and is following her to America for the purpose of proposing to her. What can be done? Would she accept him, do you think? The whole thing is most distasteful to me, and would be unfortunate in many ways for all of us. I suppose we cannot prevent it if he has made up his mind and she chooses to say "Yes," but if you find any opportunity — where it would not do more harm than good — try to dissuade him. You may imagine how anxious I am. He has been in a perfect fever to get off ever since he received a letter from Constance telling us all the news of Meadowford. He was awfully pleased at the idea of Maurice's probable engagement to that pretty Miss Silverton, and said her father had been one of his oldest friends, but that is evidently not the cause of this hurried visit ——

"Well," said Maurice, folding up the letter and returning it to his brother, "as I said before, there is nothing to be done but to wait developments. And in spite of all this, I *cannot* believe that my father wants to marry Mrs. Dexterous, nor she him. It's too ridiculous."

"I don't know; he's a devilish fine-looking old gentleman, and well supplied with this world's goods."

"Not as well as he was before he divided things among us," said Maurice.

"But she may n't know that," suggested Gilbert. "We might drop a hint to Mrs. Cacklethorpe. Something about an indigent parent, you know. Or you might go in and cut him out before he arrives. Let me see, he left on the 9th. That was — why, he 'll be here directly. He ought to arrive next Saturday."

"I 'm afraid that won't give me time enough," answered Maurice, drily. "Throw me a cigarette, will you? I have left my case upstairs."

"Where are you going?" asked Gilbert, as his brother left the room.

"To see if I can find Julia. This is too good a day to waste in the house," returned Maurice, and whistling to the dogs, he departed.

But Julia was not to be found easily. He made a tour of the downstairs rooms; he interviewed her maid, whom he had happened to

meet in the hall; he walked through the conservatory, and was just starting down the steps to the garden when he met William, the footman, coming up with some late flowers and Autumn leaves that he had been collecting for table decoration, and on making inquiries from him learned that Miss Silverton had left the house some minutes since, alone, to the best of William's knowledge and belief, and going, as he imagined, for a walk.

Maurice informed himself of the direction she had taken and sauntered after her. He wondered why she had not waited a little longer, or sent word to him, if she had been in a hurry to start. They had not exactly made an engagement, but they had spoken of walking after luncheon. "One can never be too particular when one's business is a woman," thought Maurice, turning down the road to the left, as he conjectured, from certain little heel-marks in the stiffened mud at the side, that Julia must have done. The sun was still warm and the air soft, the green fir-trees began to show conspicuously among the yellowing birches and liquid ambers, and all the distances were veiled in a blue and purple haze. Mau-

rice threw away the end of his cigarette and stopped to light a pipe, and the dogs scrambled up the bank and chased imaginary small game among the dead leaves.

Resuming his line of march again more briskly, Mr. Donaldson came round a corner to a place where he could command a long stretch of road, and where his eyes expected to light on the slim figure of his lady-love tripping along at no very great distance ahead of him, but, somewhat to his astonishment, no such figure was to be seen. "She can't have got so far off if she only left the house a few minutes before I did," he said to himself. "The earth must have opened and swallowed her up," and then a sudden sharp stab went through his heart as it struck him that the sentence would only be true when she was dead — his pretty, gentle little lady, whom he loved tenderly and passionately, and in all the ways a man should love a woman. He put the thought away from him with a mental shudder, and strode on quickly, but with no particular purpose. You cannot follow a lady as the King followed Madame Blaize unless she has walked before, and he began to think

William had been misguiding him, that, whatever direction Julia had taken, it was not this one.

Far down ahead of him he saw the cottage at the crossroads, and he wondered how Herbert liked his quarters, and whether he had done anything in the way of alteration. It might not be a bad plan if Julia and he owned such a little house for the Spring and Autumn. How amusing it would be to keep house with Julia! She would affect such a charming simplicity about the ordinary commonplaces of daily life. She would make such nice little stories out of her own mistakes, and insist so strenuously on being praised for her good intentions. A reasonable woman pretending to be unreasonable is a most entrancing companion. He had watched her at dinner the night before, talking to Herbert. She had such a pretty, quiet way of speaking. She permitted herself no mannerisms of facial expression when she talked, as so many women — even handsome women like his neighbour, Marian Dexterous — did, and he had thought her by far the most charming person he had ever seen, the one who best satisfied his taste. He had said so

to Mrs. Dexterous — why did people *always* put him next to her at dinners now? — who at once agreed, with suspicious cordiality, and he had tried to tell Julia herself, later, something of the way he felt, poor as words were to express it, but she had seemed less responsive than usual. And then Gilbert had come in and interrupted them. That was rather funny. He smiled involuntarily as he remembered. They had been standing in front of the fire, and just as he had begun to make Julia smile that nice, demure little smile of hers at some of the things he was saying, Gilbert had come hastily into the room, exclaiming, "I say, Maurice, I must speak to you seriously about this affair of Mrs. Dexterous's — " and had stopped short, with his mouth open in surprise, on finding that his brother was not alone. Discretion was not Gilbert's strong point, and if rumours of his father's infatuation for the handsome widow did not get about, it would not be his fault. Not that it made any difference if Julia knew; he had half a mind to tell her himself, only it did not seem quite fair.

He had reached this point in his meditations

when he suddenly become aware that two people had come out of the cottage, which by that time he had nearly reached, and were rapidly approaching him. One of them was John Herbert and the other Julia.

Maurice was taken by surprise for an instant, but only for an instant.

"You have stolen my lady, Herbert," he said, as they met, "and I am in hot pursuit. I was under the impression that Miss Silverton was going to walk with me this afternoon."

"And Miss Silverton has been to see Mr. Herbert's pictures instead," answered Julia. "A private exhibition, especially for her; and very beautiful they are. But I don't think we made any positive engagement to walk, did we?" she asked, looking at Maurice for the first time, and appearing, he thought, a little less at her ease than usual.

"Won't you both come back, and we will appease Donaldson with strong drink, while your old friend, Mrs. Minching, the housekeeper, will give you and me some afternoon tea?" suggested Mr. Herbert.

"I 'm afraid I must not stop for that," said Miss Silverton, "especially as strong drink is

not one of Mr. Donaldson's weaknesses, and therefore we could not appease him in that way. If he is really angry I had better let him take me home at once. I suppose he feels responsible to his sister-in-law for my safe conduct. Good-bye, Mr. Herbert; thank you so much!"

Mr. Herbert laughed at this sudden dismissal, lifted his cap from his red crest of hair and turned away, but the next instant Julia's voice called after him, —

"You'll work at once on the particular picture I like, won't you?"

"On Friday," he answered, laughing again, "please the gods."

Maurice and his companion walked on together in silence for some minutes. The pink glow of the sunset was on their faces, but the air had grown sharper, and Julia shivered.

"I ought to have taken off my jacket while I was looking at the pictures," she said. "I was too hot then, and now I am too cold."

"It would have been wiser," returned Maurice, agreeably. "Were you amused? Did he show you pretty things and tell you nice stories?"

"You talk as if I were a little girl," observed Miss Silverton, sweetly.

"And so you are, the nicest little girl in the world — only I don't think you ought to let your particular playfellow wander about alone this lovely afternoon, while you flirt in corners with attractive artists."

Julia looked up at him. She would like to have exclaimed, with *Carmen*, "*Que je meure si tu n'es pas jaloux!*" But there was no trace of anything approaching jealousy to be seen upon Mr. Donaldson's impressive face.

"We talked only of paintings," she said indifferently, "and did not flirt at all. He is always my very good friend."

"With a man like Herbert the very-good-friend stage either precedes or follows the other. Let us strike out the 'always,' and as for flirting, you know, Julia, that *we* have flirted when discussing subjects far less romantic than painting."

"Such as what, for instance?" inquired Miss Silverton, with languid curiosity. She was getting rather angry, though she could not show it.

"Well, *buttons* was the last subject that we

discussed flirtatiously," said Maurice, with an air of interested recollection.

"Buttons!" echoed Julia. "What are you talking about?"

"Yes. At least, I believe it was not a button, after all, but a sleeve-link. Don't you remember? We were sitting on the sofa, and in moving a cushion behind you — I believe I am correct in saying that I was moving the cushion — my sleeve-link caught in the lace of your waist, and I said (what I did does not matter), 'That would be difficult to explain if anyone came in suddenly,' and you said, 'Yes, difficult to explain, but not hard to understand.' You said it so nicely! I love the way you say things and the way you look when you say them."

The ways Miss Silverton looked at that moment were too many and various to be followed by a mere man. She was puzzled, uneasy, indignant, and, in spite of herself, a little amused, all at the same time. She had gone to the studio according to an appointment made with Mr. Herbert at dinner, when she had been particularly exasperated by the conduct of affairs opposite. Later, Gilbert's unfortunate

remark had not tended to smooth matters, and it was with the most deliberately malicious intentions that she had set out that afternoon. Constance, who was to have accompanied her, being detained at the last moment, she had gone alone. She had expressed admiration judiciously, she had recalled old days with just the proper undercurrent of suppressed regret, she had promised to sit for her picture again — those last sittings which he reminded her were still his to claim — in fact, she had flirted abominably, and therefore felt quite pleasantly excited and guilty when she so suddenly came face to face with Maurice in the road. She had been ready to refuse explanations, and he had asked for none. She had been prepared to defend herself, and he had given her no chance. She had meant to be indifferent and rather cold, and he reminded her of an incident which, while mischievously emphasising their serious relations, could not be taken seriously. He was certainly very clever, was Maurice, and so she allowed the corner of her mouth to curve a little — the corner which was farthest from him.

"I am glad my expression is satisfactory,"

she said serenely. "I am very fortunate to be able to please you with so little trouble to myself."

"Oh, I dare say you will have trouble enough before you have done with it," returned Mr. Donaldson, impersonally. "I am very hard to please on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays."

Julia laughed outright. "And this is Wednesday," she said. "What a remarkable coincidence it would be if I had happened not to please you to-day!"

"Oh, but you have. Your delightfully dignified, demure, frightened, guilty yet triumphant expression when I met you with Herbert just now was a sight for the gods. You could n't do anything like anybody else in the world, could you, my sweetheart? You knew you had been naughty, and you meant to be naughtier, and at first you were afraid I should notice it too much, and then you were afraid I was not going to notice it at all, and now ——"

"And now," cried Julia, highly incensed, "I am afraid that I shall lose my temper if we discuss the matter any further. Upon my

word! when it comes to noticing things I think you had better extend the same latitude to my conduct that I do to yours."

"An implied accusation," exclaimed Maurice, with satisfaction. "I was hoping it might come to that. Now we shall know where we stand. And what do you observe about my conduct that does not please your Majesty?"

"Nothing," returned Miss Silverton, hastily, seeing herself almost entrapped into the admission of having remarked a state of affairs which she had determined to ignore. "Nothing. And therefore, as I find no fault with your behaviour, I trust that you will save yourself the trouble of finding fault with mine."

"Don't mention it," said Maurice; "it's a pleasure to find fault with you. You have no idea how meekness becomes you."

"I never felt less meek in my life!" flashed out Julia.

"And yet you look perfectly cowed," returned Mr. Donaldson, looking at her critically. "Almost as if you were going to cry."

"Maurice!" cried his exasperated lady-love, "if you are trying to provoke me, for some

purpose of your own, you are succeeding beyond your wildest expectations."

"And you did not set out to provoke me for some purpose of your own, did you, you patient Griselda?" he said, laughing. "Oh, my dearest, when you know how I love you, why do you want to wound me, even with pin-pricks? I am not jealous of Herbert, but I hate it that you should wish me to be. It is not necessary. I love you quite enough as it is, and I think you know it, don't you?"

"I have had reason to be less certain, perhaps, lately," murmured Julia.

Maurice put a peremptory hand on her arm and stopped her short in the middle of the road. He looked very stern and determined.

"Take that back, Julia," he said roughly. "You know it is absurd. As a joke it was all very well, but this is serious, now. I am in earnest. Do you really believe in your heart that I could care for anyone but you?"

She considered for a moment, with lowered eyes and a heightened colour. Then she looked up at him frankly. "No," she said, "I do not, really, in my heart, but my head has been getting a little bewildered. One sees things

and hears things and — and — " The rest was inaudible except for the words " Marian Dexterous " and " they said " and " everybody seemed to think," and even these were somewhat muffled by being breathed against the sleeve of his coat. Fortunately, the twilight had fallen over the face of the world.

" You are certainly the sweetest little lady that ever lived!" declared Maurice to the four winds of heaven, " but you are not easy to manage."

" I am afraid I am more of a trouble than a pleasure to you," returned Miss Silverton, shaking her head sadly.

" Trouble ! " he echoed. " I should think you were! You need not think you are a pleasure. You are hard work."

" Well, we know the back is fitted to the burden," said Julia, laughing as she ran up the steps and into the house. She sang a great deal as she dressed for dinner and determined that she would give her portrait when finished to Maurice for a Christmas present, thus gratifying everybody — herself in the posing, John Herbert in the painting, and Maurice in the receiving — and turning a mistake to good account.

She believed that in a way Mr. Herbert was still fond of her. He sought her out in public, and his manner in private was that of one who suppresses tenderness. He had seemed almost on the point of an explanation of some sort that very afternoon. She imagined that he more than suspected her engagement to Maurice, and wondered if it had in any way revived his old feelings for her. "Those things sometimes happen," thought Julia, sagely. Of course, she had heard of his affair with the all-powerful Mrs. Dexterous, but for some reason or other — perhaps because it was a very real affair of its kind — it had not excited much comment at Meadowford. Rumour, which had remarked the fact every time Gilbert Donaldson talked to Mrs. Dexterous or Maurice rode with her, had been silent about the artist's twilight and evening visits to the cottage where she lived with an elderly cousin to play propriety; but, on the contrary, it had been most active in connecting Julia's name with that of Mr. Herbert because he and she talked to each other openly and as if they liked it.

Nevertheless, that very afternoon, could

Miss Silverton only have known it, the artist had been on the point of confessing to her — having got past the stage of ostentatious concealment to that of maudlin garrulity — his passion for Mrs. Dexterous and his hopes that she was not indifferent to it.

Although Julia was not vain, the confession would have surprised her not a little. She was quite ready to doubt Maurice's love, because it was so important to her, but John Herbert's half-friendly affection she had taken for granted, because it did not count any longer. Nothing really counted but Maurice, and though, of course, no woman could possibly object to being admired and immortalised by a great artist, who did not generally paint portraits, it behooved one to be discreet in flirting with him. Not that she made any resolutions on the subject. She was discouraged about resolutions after her lamentable failure of the afternoon, she who had loftily boasted to Constance of her inability to understand jealousy, and had proudly said, "I should ignore it if I were you," on the occasion when Gilbert and Mrs. Dexterous were

in question! "Oh, well, I was n't really jealous," thought Julia. "Not jealous," only annoyed, and I *should* have ignored it if Maurice had not been so clever. By the way, he never denied anything. I suppose it was hardly worth while when there was nothing to deny, but it would have been more courteous — and perhaps less wise. He is wise, and I know he really does love me dearly, and I snap my fingers at Marian Dexterous. Let her tumble over fences and sit next to him at dinners as often as she pleases. She is a great, handsome, obvious piece of humanity, and I don't know why I gave her a second thought, except that gossip would keep saying how attracted Maurice was by her. As if a man like Maurice could be! Still," with sudden humility, "what attracts one man attracts many, and she is awfully good to look at. Much better looking than I am, though not perhaps so pleasant," concluded Miss Silverton, smiling at herself in the glass.

She was as good as an angel all that evening and the next day; as amusing, ingenuous, and charming as any lady could be.

"It is because you found fault with me,"

she told Maurice. "I am as likely as not to be good for a week now."

"If you are going to be any better than you have been," he returned, "I must really cut the long feathers in your wings."

It was perhaps partly owing to the neglect of this precaution that she managed to make her escape unnoticed on Friday afternoon to Mr. Herbert's studio, accompanied by her maid and a box containing a wonderful bronze-coloured velvet dress.

She had almost made up her mind not to go, to send a polite little note excusing herself, and stay contentedly idling with Maurice instead, but to her surprise he had not seemed inclined to idle. A letter he received at luncheon had appeared to be of sufficient importance to require an immediate answer, and after that meal he had disappeared with Gilbert. Constance again had a headache and was shut up in her room, and Julia's flight had been so particularly easy that it lost all interest.

"This is very tame," she said plaintively, as Mr. Herbert received her at the door. "I had hoped to make use of all my diplomacy

in arriving here unsuspected. We agreed not to publish our proceedings to the world, did n't we? But nobody has asked me a single question, and here I am."

"I have been more fortunate," he answered, laughing. "I have had to tell at least two distinct falsehoods on the occasion, both to the same person. Mrs. Dexterous asked me last night what I was doing this afternoon, and I said I could not tell — I might be painting, miles from here, or I might be going to town. And she asked me, if I went, to bring her a book she wanted, and I said I would, so I have had to send my man for it."

"Well, that seems more satisfactory," said Julia, who little knew how much Mr. Herbert would have begrudged the afternoon had he not had the prospect of an evening in the society of the Circe who had bewitched him.

John Herbert's studio was a small, bare room on the ground-floor which had once served as a "sitting-room" to the inhabitants of the farmhouse. It had a funny little old wooden mantelpiece, painted a dull yellow, and the walls were covered with a gray-green

paper that absorbed most of the light which the little windows used to let in, and a good deal of that which streamed from the large one, ceiling-high, which had been cut between them. A divan occupied one corner, and a very large, worn, green leather easy-chair pranced into the middle of the room. Easels and little painting-tables stood about, and canvases leaned against the wall in layers. Julia sat in state upon an old carved chair mounted on four claret boxes, and thought how amusing it all was.

"I like it better than your old studio," she said; "that was so formal it filled one with awe, and so cold that it sent shivers down one's back."

"I don't think you were much awe-struck. Do you remember the day you put excelsior whiskers round the face of my beautiful tall clock and dressed it in a soft hat and an old cloak, just as Mrs. Hamet Nailer, of Chicago, and her husband were about to inspect my famous picture, 'The Hillside'?"

"Well, well, they bought it, just the same; it would have taken more than a clock to stop them after they heard the price. They knew

it must be good when they found what it was going to cost them. They were quite ugly enough, too, to have stopped the clock forever if I had not hidden its face."

"That view of it entirely escaped me," said John Herbert, shaking back his red wave of hair. "Your head a little more that way, if you please. You have the dearest little shadow at the corner of your mouth. I like you much better than my landscapes."

"You did not always," remarked Julia, deepening the shadow with a smile.

"Oh, did n't I? I thought that was the very reason — Well, never mind. I was exceedingly in love with you, all the same."

"'Your salad days, when you were green in judgment!' As a matter of fact, I am a great deal nicer now," said Miss Silverton, confidentially.

"Don't be any nicer," he entreated. "I assure you it would be most imprudent on your part. I am just trembling on the verge of confiding my heart's secrets to you this minute. Don't smile like that. It is inhuman, and I cannot paint it. And this must be a masterpiece. Why did n't I stick to my

first start in my trade? I really think I might have made a success of portraits. Only most people would have bored me so."

Julia did not answer, and he worked in silence for a few minutes.

"That is a ripping colour, that dress," he observed presently.

"It is the same one I sat to you in before. A velvet dress takes a long time to wear out, and a picture dress is never out of fashion. I hope to keep it for the next five years. It is a great favourite of mine."

"I must have some relief for all that bronze-copper colouring, though," screwing up his eyes and stepping back to look at her. "You have not a piece of fur with you, or an opera cloak, or something?"

"I have all sorts of things at the house," she answered. "Shall I send Lucinda to make a selection? It won't take her long to get there and back."

So Lucinda was despatched for the articles decided on, and went off rather sulkily, for she hated walking, except on dry pavements, with a line of attractive shop-windows on either side of her.

For a long time Julia posed and he painted in silence, then he put down his palette.

"Do you want to hear my heart's secrets? I mean — would it bore you to hear them?" he asked suddenly, with a nervous laugh. "Don't say it would."

Julia looked up, startled. "I hope they are not very desperate," she said.

"No, only I am really head and ears in love this time," he answered, throwing down his brushes and approaching her. "I suppose no fool was *ever* as much in love as I am, and I can't keep it to myself another minute."

"You — you — do you think you are wise to tell me?" stammered Julia.

"I dare say I am not at all wise, but I know I cannot help it," he returned, striding up and down the room with his hands in his pockets and a most determined expression on his face. "Great heavens! there is Mrs. Dexterous at the gate! And I have sent my man off. Excuse me while I rout out Mrs. Minching to answer the bell, or questions, or whatever is necessary. I suppose I had better not show up, as I am supposed to be in town."

"She won't be likely to come in," said Julia after him, reassuringly.

But that, it appeared, was just what Mrs. Dexterous intended to do.

"I know Mr. Herbert is away," Julia heard her say, "but he has given me permission to come and see his pictures whenever I please, and I am going to meet a friend here this afternoon. I suppose I may go to the studio."

Julia sprang off the model-stand. "I am afraid we are discovered," she said, as John Herbert returned to her side. "Isn't it provoking?"

But it was a good deal more than provoking to hear the well-known tones of Mrs. Cackle-thorpe's voice drowning those of Mrs. Dexterous at the front door.

"Just wait for me, my dear," she was exclaiming. "I saw you goin' up the path, and I stopped the carriage and got out. Who was that woman you were speakin' to in the lane? Now, I 'll tell you what I want. I want to see John Herbert's pictures. People are always askin' me what I think of them, now he is down here, you know, and it is nice to be able to say I have seen them. Yes. You

can take me in, can't you? You know him so well."

"I 'm afraid I can't, to-day," said Marian's voice. "He is not here."

"Well, my dear, the pictures are, if he is not," returned the determined lady. "I don't see but what it is the best time to go. You don't have to say anything but what you really think, you know."

"This is too much," cried Julia. "Can't I — not hide, exactly — but efface myself for a few minutes until they have gone? Can't I go in there? She indicated a little cupboard of a room on the right, where she had changed her dress when she first came in. "If Mrs. Cacklethorpe sees me, all Meadowford will ring with the news to-morrow!"

"The devil fly away with her!" exclaimed Mr. Herbert, taking the portrait off the easel. "I will do my best. Perhaps they won't stay long. Confound it all, why did this happen to-day?"

Julia disappeared, and the door had hardly shut upon her when Mrs. Cacklethorpe and Mrs. Dexterous entered the room, followed by the protesting Mrs. Minching, whose very cap-

strings stood out with horror at this intrusion on her master's privacy.

"Why, we thought you were out, Mr. Herbert," said Mrs. Cacklethorpe. "Did n't you say he was out, Mrs. Dexterous? Yes. Well, I hope you don't mind our lookin' about a little. I am so anxious to see your pictures, you know. You celebrated men can't hope to escape notice."

"So it seems, Mrs. Cacklethorpe," answered the artist, with grim politeness. "It is almost embarrassing at times. Yes, I told Mrs. Dexterous that I might be going to town to-day, but I changed my mind, and set to work to finish a picture. If you feel in a criticising mood you might tell me what you think of it."

He placed a very much smudged oil study of a full moon, some clouds, and a dismal pond upside down on the easel, and watched the lady's face as she surveyed it. He had tried in vain to exchange glances with Marian; she steadily avoided looking in his direction, and wandered about the room in a way that made him exceedingly uneasy.

"Now, do you call that an especially fine thing?" asked the bewildered Mrs. Cackle-

thorpe, after trying unsuccessfully to make out the subject of the painting before her. "One of your best, I mean? It does not seem quite clear ——"

"No," said Mr. Herbert, gravely, turning it right side up, "it is not very clear. There's a storm coming up in the right-hand corner. You can see it better, perhaps, this way. No, it is not one of my best, though it is very fine." He searched among his canvases and placed three or four more finished studies before her. "Those are about all I have to show, I am afraid," he said. "I have not been working much lately."

"Do you sit in a carved chair, mounted on — what are they? — *boxes*, when you paint?" inquired Marian, suddenly addressing him.

"No, but — er — Mrs. Minching does when she — when she criticises things for me," he returned, with desperate presence of mind. "She is a very good critic, is Mrs. Minching. She sits there mending, you know, and telling me what is wrong, for hours at a time."

"Indeed," said Mrs. Dexterous. "I should like to see you both at work. Won't you call her in and give us an exhibition?"

"I am afraid she is getting — er — her afternoon tea or something, now," he answered, congratulating himself on his cleverness. But the effect was unexpected.

"Tea!" cried Mrs. Cacklethorpe, settling herself in a chair and throwing back her rich silk mantle. "Why, I declare, you are entertainin' us handsomely! I had meant to go down the road to the Brambles' — Mrs. Bramble is in trouble with that new housekeeper, my dear. She says she can't stay. Do you know what is the matter? They said she asked to speak to you the last time you were there; about another place, I suppose. You knew her when she was with the Donaldsons in Paris, did n't you? Well, I can go later. It will be so cozy to have tea here and a nice little gossip about our neighbours. By the way, how are our Donaldsons? And the heiress, have you seen her lately, Mr. Herbert? or is it 'on' with the 'other man'?"

"She — er — I have not been to the house for a day or two. I think she is — is confined to her room with a — oh, an attack of something or other," he returned, looking nervously at the door of the little room. "If you *will*

stay to tea, Mrs. Cacklethorpe, I shall go and hurry my housekeeper; but would n't you rather have it in the dining-room? You have not seen my dining-room."

"Why, I think we do very well here. Yes. What do you say, Mrs. Dexterous? I don't remember ever havin' tea in a studio before. Bohemian, you know. Have you any more pictures to show us, Mr. Herbert? What do you consider your best paintin's? People ask me, you know, and I like to be able to say."

"Oh, his best are hanging on other people's walls," said Mrs. Dexterous. "He has not anything to show us here. I think he is a tremendous sell, as a gallery. And I don't believe the tea is coming until the exact hour when Mrs. Minching has always been accustomed to serve it. Don't let us wait, Mrs. Cacklethorpe."

"Don't let me keep you, my dear, if you are in a hurry. I rather like sittin' here; it is a little different, you know, from what one does every afternoon," answered that lady, who suspected mischief of some sort and had no intention of going until she was satisfied as to its extent.

Marian gave an impatient sigh, and walking over to the corner of the room nearest the door of Julia's cupboard, she pretended to busy herself with a picture that leaned against the wall. John Herbert joined her.

"Do you want to see this," he asked, moving it out for her, "or me?"

"No," she answered, laughing, "I want to see Mrs. Cacklethorpe's back. I came here for a particular purpose this afternoon — oh, not to see you; I thought you were away, you know — and I am afraid her presence will defeat it."

"Let us hasten the feast, then," said Mr. Herbert, who did not in the least believe her, and who could hear Julia's dress rustle behind the door. "Come and try your powers on Mrs. Minching. You do what you please with everybody."

But before they had crossed the room there was a step in the hall, and Maurice Donaldson stood in the doorway.

"Are you having a reception, Herbert?" he asked. "May I come in? Your door stood hospitably ajar. How do you do, Mrs. Cacklethorpe? Mrs. Dexterous, you see your very obedient, humble servant. Tell me what

I can do for you," he added, following her as she walked down the room. "I am here, as you requested. By the way, you did not expect such an audience, did you?"

"No," she said, speaking very low, with her eyes fixed on Herbert, who was laughing at some story Mrs. Cacklethorpe had begun to tell him. "I expected to see you here alone. When I asked you to meet me I thought Mr. Herbert would be away. The place was convenient, for many reasons. I am afraid, though, that I have brought you here for nothing. I can hardly tell you what I wish to tell you — I can hardly beg you —" She stopped short. "If only we were alone!" she said. "I know you would do anything I asked."

Though her words were quite inaudible to the other occupants of the room they were distinct enough to Julia, near whose place of concealment she stood. Miss Silverton felt absolutely stunned for a moment. The earth seemed cut away from beneath her feet. Could this really be Maurice — Maurice, who was her lover, her *property?* She listened intently for his next words.

"Could n't we go somewhere else?" he said. "We must talk ——"

But at that minute there was an outbreak of exclamation from Mrs. Cacklethorpe which completely overpowered the rest of the sentence.

"Look, my dear!" she cried, with the triumphant note of the trumpet in her voice. "We have caught him at last!" And she pointed to the door, where stood the perplexed Lucinda, flushed from her walk and bearing a fur boa and a magnificent opera cloak over her arm. "Now we know the meaning of the chair on the boxes. The woman 'hopes her young lady is not tired of waitin'.' He has — shall we say a model or a sitter? — concealed about the premises."

"It would be better if you said neither, Mrs. Cacklethorpe," said Maurice, who recognised the maid. "My fiancée, Miss Silverton, was, I know, sitting for her portrait to Mr. Herbert at my particular request. There is nothing to conceal about that."

"I had no idea Mr. Herbert painted portraits," said Mrs. Dexterous, with a carefully suggested little sneer.

"He has only painted one," said Julia's

voice, quietly, from behind her. "He has only painted *mine* because he loves me, as I have sat for him because I love him. Not for any other reason than that. Not at the request of anybody. I choose to be with him, I prefer him to any man in the world, and when I hold out my hand to him, as I do now, my heart is in it, for him to take or leave."

She was shaking all over with suppressed passion. Her eyes were blazing, her cheeks scarlet. She held her head up proudly, and her heavy bronze-coloured dress fell about her like a royal robe. She stood all alone, with her back to the room out of which she had come, and they stood opposite in a group, looking at her.

"For him to take or leave," she repeated, holding out her hand.

And John Herbert stepped forward and kissed it.

IV

The sudden pang with which one awakes to consciousness and a sense of loss at the same instant was felt by Julia many times during the night which followed the scene in the studio.

The gradual disappearance of the other actors, the parting between herself and Herbert, the hasty explanations to Constance and subsequent departure for town, her arrival at her own house and the surprised questions of her old governess, were all like the different phases of a bad dream.

Her room seemed unfamiliar. The chairs and tables and pictures had a new expression because she looked at them with new eyes. It seemed as if the whole world had changed in the last few hours, as if it had somehow rolled away from beneath her feet and left her floating in space, alone and stunned, but with a curious, excited discomfort about her heart that would be pain by-and-by as she began to realise what had happened.

She ordered supper and could not eat it. She went to bed and could not sleep. For hours she lay looking into the darkness and going over and over the events of the afternoon. At last she could stand it no longer, and lighting a candle, found herself some trional and took a dose that induced half a night of semi-conscious repose broken by sudden awakenings.

It is not very amusing to wrench one's heart out of the keeping of an unworthy lover and bestow it, bruised and bleeding, on another man, however ready that man is to receive it. And, after all, was he so ready? Julia had not doubted that he was about to avow his love for her when the appearance of Marian Dexterous interrupted him, but she thought she had detected a certain reserve in his expressions after he and she were left alone.

Still, Maurice was punished. That was the main point. It did not matter who was pleased. Of course, he could never have loved her, but at least his pride must have been wounded, his vanity hurt, by her open repudiation of him and her acknowledged preference for John Herbert. It was well done, — here her eyes flashed and sparkled as they had in the studio, — and she was glad of it; and here she buried her face in the pillow and cried heartily.

It was yet quite early in the morning. The light in the room was dim, the noises in the street were distinct but intermittent. Would it never be time to get up? She was so tired

of lying there, thinking and feeling. There was no rest but in action, yet what was there to do? She supposed Mr. Herbert would come to see her sometime during the day. How Meadowford would ring with the news of their engagement and its cause! She could hear Mrs. Cacklethorpe saying, "Yes, my dear, I was there. So fortunate, for otherwise I could n't tell you about it. Well, Herbert has got the heiress — absolutely threw herself at his head, you know, and he could n't refuse. She is just crazy about him, my dear. They say he proposed before and she would not have him. I don't believe it. She would have stuck to it fast enough if he had. Well, Maurice Donaldson is well rid of her; that 's what I say."

And, indeed, this was very much what Mrs. Cacklethorpe did say when she reached the Brambles' that day, with her feathers waving in the wind and her tongue wagging at both ends. Such a piece of gossip had not been hers to disseminate for years.

Julia wondered what Gilbert would think of it all when Constance told him. She liked Gilbert. She wished she had seen him to say

good-bye. She wondered what had become of Maurice when he left the studio, whether he had been relieved to find her gone when he returned to the house. He could hardly have had the audacity to spend the evening with Mrs. Dexterous, she supposed. Not that it was anything to her if he had. Only, when one has loved a man — that is, when one has been engaged to him — one does not like to believe him capable of conspicuously bad taste over and above the villainy of being in lo — no, she could not yet believe he was in love — of carrying on an affair with another woman. "I always said that if I were beaten I should throw down my cards gracefully and give up the game," thought Julia, "but I never thought I should have to do it. Oh, will it never be time to get up?"

She heard the postman whistle at eight o'clock, and made up her mind that if there were a letter from Maurice she would not open it. He could make no explanation that would in the least excuse his conduct. But he might have attempted one, she thought later, when her maid brought her in her breakfast tray and she beheld nothing more interesting in the way

of letters than an elaborate advertisement of Obesity Soap.

"I don't need to be much thinner," thought Julia, pathetically, looking at her slender hand as she poured out her tea. And she pictured herself dying of rapid consumption, with John Herbert and Maurice in heart-broken attendance. It seemed a very fitting outcome of the situation.

Two cups of tea and several pieces of toast made her less pathetic and more indignant. She had worked herself up into quite a respectable rage by the time she was dressed. That she should have been in love with a man like that! That she should have been fretting — she supposed she had been fretting — all night long because she had been fortunate enough to discover in time what a contemptible person he was! It was absurd.

She wondered if he would try to see her — to argue with her. She would not see him, of course. And then she rang the bell and gave orders that she was at home to nobody but Mr. Herbert — unless someone asked for her very particularly. This being satisfactorily attended to, there was nothing to be done but get through

the day as well as she could. She would not go out because — because she might meet Maurice in the street (which, being interpreted, meant missing him at the house), so she sat down to read, and got up to wander restlessly about the room, went up stairs to talk to her bewildered governess, and down stairs to give orders to the cook, who was an old family servant and had known her since her baby-hood. At last she went into the drawing-room and tried, with the perfectly impossible set of writing materials she kept there, to write a letter to Constance.

At twelve o'clock a hansom drove up to the door and the bell rang. Julia's heart flew to her throat and then fell to her feet. She sprang up, but an attentive servant had already opened the door, and she could not make her escape through the hall. She retreated to the curtains which divided the front from the middle room.

"Is Miss Silverton at home?" Maurice's voice inquired. "I wish particularly to see her."

"I am not sure, sir. I will see. What name shall I say?" returned the discreet par-

lour-maid, who did not know Mr. Donaldson. She pushed open the door for him as she spoke and ran up stairs with the card he had given her.

Maurice walked toward the window and stood looking out.

Julia, who might easily have slipped through the curtains if she had desired to do so, took a step forward instead, her flounced skirt rustling on the parquet floor. She told herself that it would be cowardly to avoid the interview.

"I am here," she said, "but I don't know what you can possibly have to say to me."

Maurice turned at the sound of her voice and approached her.

"I have a great deal to say to you," he answered gravely, "but not yet. First, I should like to hear some explanation of your extraordinary conduct."

"Of my extraor — of *my* conduct?" stammered Julia. "What do you mean?"

"Well, it is not usual for a lady who is engaged to one man to retract her word as publicly and insultingly as possible and give it to another under circumstances that are at least questionable."

"And it is not fitting that a man, if he is engaged to a woman whom he pretends to love, should make clandestine appointments with another woman, whose affection for him is as evident as his for her."

"There you speak no more than the truth," said Maurice. "My affection for her is just as evident as hers for me."

"And for me, I suppose, it never existed?" cried Julia, tauntingly.

"That I do not admit for a moment. I have loved you almost from the first time I saw you, and in the bottom of your heart you know it, whatever you choose to think."

"You took a curious way of showing it. You must remember that I *heard* what Mrs. Dexterous and you were saying, and you cannot explain it away. Oh, when I think how I trusted you! how fond I was of you ——!"

"*You* took rather a curious way of showing *that*. You find me in a somewhat equivocal position, and judge me without a moment's hesitation, asking for no explanation, willing to throw over the whole future happiness of our lives for one moment of revenge. I could not have treated you so."

"If you have any excuse to offer I will listen," said Julia, tentatively.

He laughed. "You are inimitable!" he exclaimed. "You overhear a few words you cannot understand, you renounce me with a flourish of trumpets, and now you say you will listen to my excuses. It is a little late, Julia."

"A little late to offer them — I quite agree with you," she answered.

"To a lady who has given me no earlier opportunity?" He stood looking down at her half-humorously and half-sadly. "But, as a matter of fact, I have no excuses to make," he added.

"So I imagined. The indefensible position you were in ——"

"And what were you in?" he asked, suppressing a smile.

The obviously truthful answer was, "In the cupboard," but this did not suggest itself to Julia.

"As you yourself testified, I had been sitting for my portrait," she said coldly.

"With my knowledge and approval — indeed, at my particular request, as I also testified."

"You were so kind as to say so, but it was not necessary for you to defend me."

"I am afraid you are not the best judge of that."

"Suppose we do not discuss it any more," said Julia. "We will say that I chose, for my own reasons, to break my engagement with you and to marry Mr. Herbert. I am accountable to nobody but myself for my conduct."

Maurice laughed again. "Then I will appeal to you against yourself. From Philip dr — I mean from Julia's pride to Julia's sense of justice. Remarking, by the way, that our engagement is not broken, and that you will never marry Herbert if you live a thousand years."

"Shall I not?" cried Julia, greatly incensed. "We shall see!"

"If we live long enough," agreed Maurice. "Suppose we sit down. I have a great deal to say to you, and I don't want to tire you more than I can help."

Julia subsided into a corner of the sofa, looking very mutinous, and he drew up a chair opposite.

"I suppose it sounds absurd to say that my poor old father is really the cause of all this trouble, but it is true. You remember, perhaps, coming into the room one day when Gilbert was reading a letter from him, announcing his sudden arrival 'on private and particular business'?"

Julia nodded, and Maurice moved a little nearer.

"Later we had a letter from my sister, telling us that she had reason to believe he was infatuated with Marian Dexterous, whom he had seen in Paris last Spring, and that he was coming over with the intention of marrying her if she would have him. While the thing was perfectly preposterous and unsuitable, it was by no means impossible. We were quite powerless to stop it if he chose to persist, but we wished to keep it quiet until the matter was settled beyond a doubt. You can see that Mrs. Dexterous and her proceedings became of more and more interest to us."

"So much so that you began to make love to her on your own account."

"No," said Maurice, smiling, "I should

hardly say I made love to her, and I do not think she is under any such impression."

"Yet you have secret meetings with her at Mr. Herbert's studio."

"There was not much secrecy about that meeting, as it turned out, and I am hanged if I know yet what she would have said to me if we had been alone. As far as Gilbert and I could tell from her note, she wanted to consult me about something connected with my father's arrival and a 'most unhappy and penitent woman,' whom we took to be herself. But why she selected Herbert's studio for the confession, and for what reason she is a most unhappy and penitent woman — unless she has brought my respected father over here on false pretences, and is ashamed of herself, which I more than suspect is the case — I know no more than you do. I left the house directly after you made your announcement, and I have not seen or heard from her since."

Julia covered her perplexed eyes with her hand and sat perfectly still.

"You see," continued Maurice, "I offer no excuses. I make a simple explanation of the facts. But I appeal to my Julia, against the

imperious lady who renounced me yesterday, to tell whether she does not think some excuses are due me. No answer? Is our engagement broken, Julia?"

He pushed away the chair and took his place beside her on the sofa.

"Don't you think you might have trusted me, my sweetheart? After all, you know I am at least a ——"

"Oh, never mind what you are!" cried Miss Silverton, throwing herself into his arms. "I am the most graceless baggage in the world, and deserve to be beaten. Only — only — I ——"

"You hope I won't beat you. Your confidence is not misplaced," said Maurice, kissing her hair, as her face was hidden against his shoulder.

"That was not at all what I meant," she declared, sitting up indignantly. "I was going to say that you must admit I had some reason for thinking as I did."

"And for behaving as you did, also."

"No, no," murmured Miss Silverton, returning hastily to her former position. "I am afraid that was — was ill-judged. I was so

angry, you see. I am so unaccustomed to lose control of myself, I hardly knew what I was going to do till I had done it."

"You did it with a vengeance," said Maurice, laughing. "Mrs. Cacklethorpe will never forget it to her dying day. And I think Mrs. Dexterous was rather taken aback. It hit her pretty hard, you see."

"Mrs. Dexterous! Why?" cried Julia, sitting upright again.

"Well, I fancy she is rather in love with Herbert, herself," returned Mr. Donaldson, carelessly, but watching the effect of his words.

"In love with Mr. Herbert! Good heavens! Why, I am engaged to Mr. Herbert at the present minute! I forgot all about it! What am I to do, Maurice? Oh, what an awful tangle everything is in! And there seems to be no decent way out of it but for me to marry him."

"Oh, I would n't go quite so far as that. Suppose you see him and explain to him——"

"That I was just using him as a means of punishing you, because I was — was jealous of you," said Julia, ruefully, "while all the time

I really loved you dearly. It does not seem easy to say, does it?"

"Not very," admitted Maurice, keeping back a smile.

"Because he really is very fond of me, and it was not his fault at all."

"That is true also, and nobody could possibly deny his fondness or his lack of fault. But I find that just lately he also has yielded to the fascinations of our wonderful widow, and is, somewhat to his own surprise, head over ears in love with her. Quite mad about her."

"He is? Are you sure? Then that must have been what he was going to tell me about when he spoke of his 'heart secrets,' and I imagined — But how did you find it out?"

"He told me himself."

"He did?" cried Julia. "How mortifying! And what a relief! What a sensible man he is not to like me!"

"He would have been very far from a sensible man if he had avowed any great preference for you after I began to talk to him."

"When did you see him?"

"I waited until he was alone in the studio

and went back there directly. I told him that, under some misapprehension, you had been transferring property that did not belong to you, and anybody attempting to accept the same would be held responsible for a misdemeanour. In fact, I rather threatened to have his life-blood if he thought of holding you to anything you had said, even after giving you due time for reflection. And he, like the man of the world he is, instead of quarrelling with me, showed me at once that he understood what had happened and why it had happened. He told me of his extreme admiration and affection for you, disclaimed any idea of holding you to your word, — it was here that I surprised his confidence about Mrs. Dexterous, — but added that he should consider himself at your disposition until he heard from you that your engagement to me was still agreeable to you."

"Is n't he a dear?" said Julia. "So sensible! You can tell at once he has been a great deal with women all his life. And do you wonder that, next to you ——"

"No, indeed, I only wonder you did not take him long ago; but he can't have another

chance. It is too late now. As I said a short time ago, you shall never marry him if you live a thousand years."

"You said 'will' before, you know."

"Is our engagement broken, Julia? No? Then I shall say what I please, and dictate to you as much as I like. You promised to let me manage you, and then you publicly defied me! Now, I am going to be despotic in private life, I warn you, and intimidate you with threats if you don't do what I say."

"While the fit is on you, would you mind dictating what I shall say to Mr. Herbert?" said Julia, rising and going to the writing table.

"Far be it from me to interfere in a private correspondence of that nature," returned Maurice, collapsing at once.

Julia laughed. "I shall just say that he is the very nicest man in the world, but, on the whole, I find my engagement to you less disagreeable than I expected."

"That will do perfectly," said Maurice, "though your reference to me is perhaps unduly flattering."

Julia wrote quickly, and in a few minutes the letter was signed and addressed.

"Is he at Meadowford?" she asked, looking up.

"No," said Maurice, "he is at the Knickerbocker Club. We came up together this morning. You might send the letter there. He is waiting for it."

"Upon my word, you seem to have taken things very much for granted."

"My dear little girl," he answered, "there was only one way out of this particular difficulty, but if there had been a hundred, you would have taken my way, because you *know* I love you and understand you, and because you are beginning to find out that you like me — even a little more than you thought. Are n't you?"

"And suppose I had found out that I did not like you?"

"Why, then you should have married me just the same, as a fitting punishment for all the trouble you have given me."

"Maurice," said Miss Silverton, solemnly, "did you sleep at all last night?"

"Not unless I slept standing," he returned, with a short laugh.

"Well, no more did I, worth mentioning,

and I came to the conclusion — sub-consciously, you know — that, justly angry as I was with you, in some way you *must* prove yourself right, because I loved you. And I think that is the difference between men and women; men use their reason to prove their hearts, and women use their hearts to disprove their reason."

"Luncheon is served," said the voice of the servant at the door.

"You will stay?" said Julia.

"I hoped you might ask me," answered Maurice, modestly.

"You might send away your hansom."

"But I must go down to meet the *Gascogne* directly after luncheon. I thought perhaps you would come with me. We shall find Constance and Gilbert at the dock. It will be the least formal way of — Oh, good-morning, Miss Boyd. I have been instructing your pupil in psychomachy this morning, and it is a fatiguing process, as perhaps you have found. May I come and refresh exhausted nature in your society?"

"What is psychomachy?" whispered Julia, as they went into the dining-room.

"A conflict of the soul with the body," he returned, pulling out her chair for her.

They had a very merry meal together, indulging in small jokes and allusions that so completely puzzled and confused Miss Boyd that she watched them later drive away from the door with the same sense of relief as that experienced by a nervous pussy-cat when the youth of the neighbourhood return to school.

It was a beautiful Autumn day, with a deep blue sky, great rolling white clouds, and a fresh salt breeze. The streets were filled with carriages, and Julia and Maurice recognised several nodding and smiling acquaintances as their hansom threaded its way down Fifth Avenue. There was the usual confusion about the Waldorf-Astoria: omnibuses crawling up-hill, with weary horses straining and struggling; omnibuses sliding down-hill, pushing their horses ahead of them till the harness threatened a disastrous leave-taking; red cable cars clanging their way across town, clumsy automobiles backing and filling, hansoms dashing out of Thirty-third Street and losing themselves in the general mass of vehicles going north or vehicles going south; hawkers of over-blown

violets and chrysanthemums moving to and fro on the sidewalk among the people.

"What a caravansary it is!" said Julia, looking at the huge red pile. "Who but an American would willingly stay in a great, noisy, crowded place like that? There is a woman who looks exactly like Mrs. Dexterous just getting into a hansom! I don't think I shall ever care to be thrown much with Mrs. Dexterous after this, Maurice, so I hope she won't marry your father."

"I don't see why she should," he answered, "for I am sure she is in love with Herbert and he with her. However, there is no accounting for women, and I shall not be easy until the dear old gentleman is safely out of the country."

"You will just let him wait till *we* are married, won't you?" asked Julia, after a pause. "You suggested it first, you know."

"Darling," cried Maurice, "that is the best thing you have said yet. If only we were not in this confounded ——!"

But at this instant the horse was pulled up with such a jerk that they nearly found themselves deposited on the pavement, and a tower-

ing policeman, with black hair and red mustaches, warned them back with one uplifted hand while he escorted five female shoppers, two errand girls, an old woman with a pug (who, not satisfied of her safety, even under his protection, ran splay-footed ahead of him all the way), and a cautious-minded elderly clergyman with an umbrella, across Twenty-third Street.

As they began to move forward again, another hansom overtook and passed them, and in it were seated Mrs. Dexterous and John Herbert.

"He did not lose much time," said Julia, laughing.

"Or she did not," suggested Maurice. "I wonder where the deuce they are going."

But it very soon became apparent that the destination of the two cabs was the same. Sometimes they followed each other; sometimes, in friendly rivalry, made a dash for the same opening at the same minute, and drove along side by side; sometimes the stream of travel divided them, but they never quite lost sight of each other through all the turns and twistings of the lower Westside streets, and they both drew up in triumph at the entrance

to the pier of the Compagnie Générale Transatlantique, with Maurice's man a trifle in the lead.

Julia hastily descended and hurried into the big building.

"It really is embarrassing, you know," she said, over her shoulder, "though it is awfully funny. I suppose she has come to meet your father. But why bring Mr. Herbert? Are they going to ask his blessing here, on the dock?"

"Heaven knows! It is beyond me. By Jove, the vessel is in; we must be late! There go the gang-planks; she will be landing her passengers directly. I wonder where Gilbert and Constance have hidden themselves."

But at that instant Gilbert pushed his way through the crowd that was gathering at the foot of the gang-plank, and joined them.

"Constance is over there," he said. "Come along. Thought you might not get here. I pictured you, with a shotgun, sitting outside the door of Julia's house, to keep her in and Herbert out. Why, here she is! This is famous! Then it is all right. I am awfully glad, and Constance will be delighted."

All the time he was making his way, with some difficulty, back to the place where he had left his wife, Julia and Maurice following him.

Constance was dressed in the most perfect of travelling gowns, crowned with a flat hat of burnished bird breasts, and stood as calmly aloof from the confusion about her as if she were a statue of the latest mode left there for transportation. She presented a beautiful, soft, pink cheek to Julia.

"Well, my dear," she said, "it is to be Maurice, after all, is it? I don't think much of your way of ignoring things," and she laughed a little; "but never mind, it has all turned out for the best. You know I told you that you did not really want your own way."

"I am just as well satisfied with the way I am going now," said Julia, with a glance of amusement at Maurice, "as if I had chosen it myself."

"And how does Mr. Herbert feel?" inquired Constance.

"He seems to be contented with his lot," returned Miss Silverton. "But you might ask him yourself. He is here, somewhere, with Marian Dexterous."

"Marian here!" cried Mrs. Donaldson. "No! Really, she is impossible. Gilbert has some cock-and-bull story about his father's wishing to marry her. I should soon put a stop to that."

"She is going on board this minute!" observed Julia. And, indeed, waved onward by gold-braided officials, and stemming with difficulty the first downpouring of released passengers, the fine figure of Mrs. Dexterous could be seen making its way up the inclined pathway. Gilbert and Maurice, who had pressed forward for the same purpose, were completely distanced.

"Do you suppose she will have the nerve to go to his cabin?" asked the former of his brother, as they finally succeeded in reaching the deck of the steamer.

"I really could not say what she would not have the nerve to do, but I think we had better hasten to the rescue."

This was, however, more easily said than done, and it was several minutes before the cabin of "Monsieur Donaldson" could be discovered. Moreover, when found it proved to be empty; but on their way back they

came upon the two people of whom they were in search, sitting side by side in earnest conversation in a corner of the saloon. Mr. Donaldson was just receiving a packet from the hands of the widow.

"Do you suppose it is a gift of welcome, or his love letters returned?" said Gilbert, irreverently. "Poor old governor! Does n't he look surprised!"

And truly the expression on Mr. Donaldson's handsome countenance was one of astonment, which was rapidly succeeded by relief.

"You don't tell me so!" he was saying as his sons approached. "You don't tell me so! I am infinitely relieved. I feel as if a weight had been taken off my mind. It has turned out most fortunately for all parties, and I shall be very glad to proceed no farther. I feel no desire to be severe, you understand. The temptation was doubtless very great."

"He takes it like a man, does n't he?" whispered Gilbert.

"I cannot thank you enough, dear Mr. Donaldson," Mrs. Dexterous answered, "both on my own behalf and — I might say, my client's. But it is just what I expected of

you. You are the most high-minded, generous, chivalrous man in the world, and I feel it is a privilege to have known you."

"I say," said Gilbert, "it is time to interfere. She will have him back again."

He coughed loudly as he spoke, and Mrs. Dexterous, turning and seeing him, sprang up in some confusion.

"I am keeping your father from you in the most shocking way," she said. "Forgive me, Mr. Maurice, — you look the sterner of the two, — and I will atone for it by taking myself off at once. But you will come to see me, please, Mr. Donaldson, won't you? I shall be in town for a few days at the Waldorf. Thank you so much. I know you will never regret what you have done to-day."

She looked up, hesitated for an instant, then, murmuring that he was an old dear, she threw her arms round his neck, gave him a hearty kiss, and fled from the saloon before any of the three could collect their wits.

"That is a very extraordinarily fine young woman," said Mr. Donaldson, looking after her. He stood with his right hand in Gilbert's and his left on Maurice's shoulder, a tall,

soldierly, upright old gentleman, with faded blue eyes and curly white hair. "Owing to her tact and kindness I have been saved from a very disagreeable duty."

He moved away from them and began to pace slowly to and fro in a manner habitual to him.

"You — you regarded it in the light of a *duty*, then?" said Gilbert.

"Certainly I did. Such things are never pleasant," returned his father.

"The discrepancy of age, perhaps —" began Maurice, in some surprise.

"What on earth has that got to do with it?" cried Mr. Donaldson, sharply.

"Alice has an idea ——"

"Oh, then, Alice suspected? I suppose that is how the thing happened to get out among you. You discussed it at some time when you were overheard by the servants. Well, all's well that ends well. I am relieved that I do not have to prosecute."

"Prosecute!" exclaimed Gilbert.

"What other course was open to me if I wanted to recover what had been stolen?"

"Stolen!" echoed Gilbert.

"What is the matter with you, Gilbert?" said his father, impatiently. "I suppose if somebody had managed to abstract ten thousand dollars' worth of United States coupon bonds from your strong-box you would call it stealing, would n't you?"

"And Mrs. Dexterous——"

"Mrs. Dexterous brought them back to me to-day, with assurances of sincere repentance. I trust the difficulty of disposing of them had nothing to do with it."

"Good God!" said Maurice, "there must be some mistake.'

"It would have been difficult to prove, perhaps," conceded Mr. Donaldson, "and I was most loth to brand any woman as a criminal. This confession and the restoration of the bonds simplify everything. Of course, she must never take another place."

"I — I am afraid she has taken one already," stammered Gilbert.

"Impossible! Mrs. Dexterous tells me that in the interview she had with her, at Mrs. Bramble's, the woman declared her intention of leaving the country at once. We must see that this is accomplished quietly. I do not

wish to trouble that charming lady further. This has been a most disagreeable business for her. She tells me that, but for an unfortunate misunderstanding, she would have placed the matter in your hands, Maurice, and got you to see the woman and receive the papers. She has felt the responsibility greatly. She says she did not dare come down here alone, lest some accident should happen to her while she was in the possession of such a trust. She brought a friend with her, a Mr. Herbert. I must tender my thanks to this gentleman. Can it be John Herbert, the artist? You don't tell me so! I thought I noticed in Paris — Yes. Well, she is one in a thousand. He is a lucky man! I am greatly grieved and disappointed in Mrs. Sykes," concluded Mr. Donaldson, shaking his head sadly. "She received many kindnesses from my daughter and me while she was in our service. I thought her an admirable housekeeper and a most excellent woman."

Maurice's hand had actually to force back the words upon his brother's lips.

"It has been a very distressing thing to you, I can see, sir," he said. "We sympa-

thise entirely with your feelings in the matter, and I suppose the less said about it the better, as it has ended so quietly. Now, let us get you off this vessel. Constance and Julia will think you are lost."

"Bless my soul!" cried his father, "are *they* here? Let us go at once. Why did n't you tell me? My man is looking after the baggage, so we may leave without delay. I would not have had those delicate young women standing about this draughty dock on my account for the world. And my new daughter-in-law, too! Maurice, I feel this as a very pretty compliment. Take me to them at once. Dear, dear!" said the kindly old gentleman, hurrying his sons along, "I have unwittingly been guilty of conduct most abhorrent to my sense of courtesy," and in a perfect tumult of outraged politeness he swept them off the ship.

"Your father is an old dear," said Julia to Maurice, as they drove home together. "He treats me as if I were a sort of a goddess who had condescended to marry the son of a mortal."

"A very proper way to treat you. Mrs.

Dexterous also says he is an 'old dear,' and *she* kissed him, which you did not."

"She is a brazen minx, which I am not."

"She is not so brazen as your Majesty thinks. She is an extraordinarily fine young woman, as my father called her. If it had not been for you and your dear little face and your tormenting ways I think I could have — Julia! Do you know that hurt?"

"Never mind," said Julia, petulantly, and quoted from "Undine:" "'If I had not bitten your finger, who knows what fine things you would have put into your story about *Bertalda!*'"

Maurice laughed. "There is nobody like you, after all, my sweet," he said, "nobody in all the world; but we really have mistaken Mrs. Dexterous among us." And he told her what had taken place that afternoon. "So you see," he concluded, "if Fate had permitted me to keep that appointment in secret, I should have known all about this business yesterday ——"

"Yes, but there are some things *I* should not have known. For instance, that one's love

for a person is proved, first, by what one is willing to forgive, and then, by what one is willing to be forgiven. Maurice, dear ——"

"If you say another word of that sort to me in this cab, Julia, I will not answer for the consequences!"

"I will wait until we get home, then," she said. "Home! That is a poor name to give to a place where you do not live! Don't you wish we were going back to our own house?"

"William," said Mr. Puffles, entering the pantry, where that worthy young man was engaged in cleaning silver, "the family is coming down to-morrow in time for lunch. Mr. Maurice's man has just arrived, and he says, 'Put places for seven,' he says, 'for that's the number you 'll have. There is old Mr. Donaldson coming to stop,' he says, 'and Miss Silverton for over Sunday, and Mrs. Dexterous and Mr. Herbert, that is invited just for the meal, and there 's three in the family,' he says, 'and that makes seven.' Which it do, William, as nobody can deny. But what I say is, what did you mean when you told me only this very morning — told me with your identical mouth,

William — that it were all over between her and Mr. Maurice?"

"I telled you what was told to me, Mr. Puffles," replied William, with dignity. "A man can do no more. One of the grooms had it from Mrs. Cacklethorpe's own coachman, which I ask no better authority. He heard as how there 'd been a big flare-up. 'Everything kicked to pieces,' he says, 'and the young lady bolted to town without a bridle. And his old woman,' he says, meaning Mrs. C. — which I don't approve his languidge, him not being long in the place — 'telling the thing high and low, till not a gentleman among them,' he says, 'but would be afraid to drive her.' What 's the matter?" he added, seeing the respected countenance of his chief purple with laughter.

"Why, it is a bit of a joke, William," said Mr. Puffles, wiping his eyes; "a very humorous saying you have just made. 'She bolted to town without a bridle,' says you, and so Miss Silverton did go off to town without marrying Mr. Maurice. You did not see it, my lad, but I have waited on table for so many years that maybe I am quicker than some to see a thing like that, quicker than some. For

it trains a man's mind as well as his legs to wait on the quality, William. They have no patience. What they wants they wants quick, and what they says they says quick, and they don't mind what they says about each other, neither. The trouble with the quality, in most places, is —" and here Mr. Puffles looked owlish with wisdom —"that they 've got no regular work to do, and so they have time to gossip. That 's the mischief of it!"

"But if they did the work," observed the footman, with the air of one making a point, "what the mischief would we do?"

"You are a well-meaning lad, William," said the butler, "though ignorant in ways I will not weary you by repeating, so that you don't always understand the turn of my thoughts. But this I 'll say to you, that the less you talk and the more you listen and work, the better it will be for you. It 's my belief, William, that there is far less harm done in the world by what people do than by what they *say* they do, or other people say they 've done. You mark my words. Gossip is a bad thing; and that reminds me that Mr. Maurice's man says that Mr. Maurice is going to marry Miss Silverton

next month; he had it direct from her maid. And he do say that a happier couple you never laid your eyes on. Now it seems but right to me that we should drink their healths at supper to-night, and I'll stand treat, William," said Puffles, swelling with pride, "in a choice bottle I had put by for myself. There is a rumour," he continued, looking abnormally sly, "that Mr. Herbert and Mrs. Dexterous is going to do likewise, and that being the case, young man, I think I'll stand two bottles. It's none too much, William, it's none too much."

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